A PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY-BASED NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF THE SOMALI BANTU REFUGEE COMMUNITY IN NAIROBI, KENYA

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The situation of Somali Bantu refugees has been studied in the USA and, to a lesser degree, in the refugee camps of Kakuma and Dadaab, but not in self-settled urban contexts in East Africa. This qualitative study, a needs assessment of the Somali Bantu refugee community in Nairobi, Kenya, contributes towards filling that gap in the literature. Participant observation and semi-structured interviews with both Somali Bantu refugees and staff of refugee-serving NGOs in Nairobi provided rich ethnographic data. Research questions focused on perceived needs and assets of refugees, community support structures, and NGO services available to Somali Bantu refugees. The results of the study showed how systems of marginalization and oppression found within Somalia are reproduced within the urban refugee environment of Nairobi. It also revealed how this marginalization was exacerbated through the systems set up by refugee-serving NGOs. However, the study also demonstrated refugee agency and aspirations, revealing strategies employed by individual refugees to improve their situation as well as multi-local and transnational kinship networks of mutual support.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Hassan had requested to conduct the interview in his 'home', a room about 6x6 ft in size. Most of that space was taken up by a full-sized bed and a small side-table. A bare light bulb hung from the ceiling, and a makeshift power socket provided the means to charge his cell phone. On the other side of the door, a narrow hallway ran past similar rooms to the common bathroom. There was no space to prepare food, but Hassan offered me a snack from a little bag of dates on the side table. He had been living here for almost a year, sharing the tiny space, and the single bed, with two other young men to afford the $25 rent per month.

> We get up early in the morning and go out to find work. When we come home, it is already dark. We can't go out at night because of the police and we are tired from work, so we just go to sleep.The bathrooms here are not good. To many people share the same toilet, and you have to pay extra for water to take a shower. It's easy to get sick that way.

We were both sitting on the edge of his bed, with my audio recorder between us. The sound of a dozen children reciting Quranic verses carried through the thin sheet-metal walls of the room from the madrassa at the front of the building. Hassan had closed the door for privacy, leaving the little room hot and stuffy.

This is Eastleigh, a neighborhood in Kenya's capital Nairobi known as "Little Mogadishu" for its large Somali community. The first impression of Eastleigh is usually the broad and busy 1st Avenue with dozens of low-end shopping malls housing thousands of small shops. That part of Eastleigh is known as a booming business hub and draws shoppers from all over Nairobi and beyond. (Carrier 2017) It's the place to buy cheap clothes and electronics from China or jewelry

and perfume from the Middle East. It is also rumored to be the place to buy weapons or fake passports, and many respectable Kenyans from the other side of town would never dare come here.

Venturing deeper into Eastleigh, one finds another side, very much at odds with the hustle and bustle and the flashy signs of the shopping malls. The smaller side streets leading off 1st Avenue are torn-up and muddy, lined with smaller shops, workshops, and roadside restaurants. Behind and above these are the apartment buildings of Eastleigh. Ugly concrete structures 4-8 floors high, with hundreds of little one-room and two-room apartments, each housing several single adults or a large family. Dark staircases are filled with the constant drip of water from lines upon lines of laundry hung to dry; narrow hallways lead to shared and dirty bathrooms.

Eastleigh is not a slum. The roads are wider, the buildings taller, and most important, the prices are much higher. Because of the booming economy, living in Eastleigh is expensive compared with many other low-income neighborhoods. Yet because of the large Somali community (both nationals and refugees), many Somali refugees chose to live here, where they can best utilize their social and cultural capital.

I have worked in Eastleigh on and off for more than a decade. Over the years, I had numerous opportunities to visit the homes of refugees in Eastleigh, and Hassan's cramped and tiny room was by no means unique. Many Somalis, Ethiopians, and, for that matter, Kenyans live in similar situations. What made Hassan different was not his poverty as such, but the fact that he was a Somali Bantu refugee, a category that comes with a number of structural barriers. I wanted to learn how his situation was shaped by the intersection of his legal status as an

urban refugee, his racialized status as what is known in Somalia as *jareer*, and his ethnic identity as a Somali Bantu.

The first time I met Somali Bantu refugees in Eastleigh was during a short research project in October 2017. I was studying the use of Maay, Somalia's largest minority language, among Somalis in Nairobi. My final focus group was organized by Amina, a young refugee lady who had recently come from Kakuma refugee camp to finish her education in Nairobi. She invited a group of young men and women who she had grown up with in the camp and who now all lived in Nairobi. As it turned out, all of them identified as Somali Bantu and asserted their identity as distinct of and separate from ethnic Somalis.

I met Amina and some of her friends again in January 2019 and learned more about their stories of fleeing Somalia as young children, growing up in the refugee camps, and being compelled to move to Nairobi in search of income opportunities to supplement the decreasing aid in the camp. I also learned more about their experiences of systemic marginalization and violent racism at the hands of ethnic Somalis.

At this point, I had studied much of the literature on Somalis in Kenya generally and in Eastleigh specifically, and I had not come across any mention of Somali Bantu refugee in Nairobi. Amina assured me that "many Somali Bantu" had come to the city in recent years, but there was no information regarding the size or demographic characteristics of this population or the social structures of their community in Nairobi. I wanted to find out more, and realized I would have to start with basic exploratory research.

At the time, I was connected to the Eastern Mennonite Mission (EMM) in Kenya, and I mentioned my interest to several of EMM's members in Nairobi. I was surprised when the East

Africa regional representative came back shortly afterwards to request that I do an assessment of the Somali Bantu refugee community in Nairobi for EMM.

When EMM tasked me with this research project in early 2019, the organization did not have any program targeting Somali Bantus in Kenya. However, EMM was one of very few international agencies to have worked among Somali Bantu communities in southern Somalia prior to the civil war and to maintain some ties with individuals from those communities in the diaspora. With ongoing work in the Somali community in Nairobi, the East Africa regional representative wanted to explore the possibility of reengaging Somali Bantus in Kenya.

The Client

The Eastern Mennonite Mission was founded in 1914 as the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities by members of Mennonite churches in Lancaster, PA. With its headquarters in Salunga, PA, EMM started international programs in the 1930s with four missionaries sent to Tanzania in 1934. In the 1950s, the work was expanded to other African countries as well as Latin America, Europe, and Asia. In some countries, such as Tanzania and Kenya, the work of EMM has led to the establishment of local Mennonite churches, while in others, such as Somalia, the focus was on development projects such as schools and hospitals. EMM operated programs in Somalia from 1953 until 1976, with numerous missionaries working in medical and educational capacities. The work focused on three locations in southern Somalia: Mogadishu, the capital city, Mahaday Weyne along the Shabelle river, and Jamaame along the Juba river.

The town of Jamaame, capital of Jamaame district in Lower Juba province of Somalia, has a mixed population from different Somali groups. But it is located in a fertile region known

as *Gosha*, populated by Somali Bantu farming communities in small agricultural villages along the Juba river. During the 1960s, EMM built and operated both a school and a hospital in Jamaame, the latter being the only hospital in the district. Members of the Somali Bantu community attended the school and several were trained as medical staff at the hospital. In the years following the coup of socialist dictator Siyad Barre in 1969, both the school and the hospital were nationalized, and the last EMM staff were ordered to leave the country in 1976.

Some EMM missionaries relocated from Somalia to Kenya and continued their educational program among the Somali community in Eastleigh. The Mennonite Fellowship Center in Eastleigh was founded by EMM in 1978 and later handed over to the Kenyan Mennonite Church, who continues to operate the center, offering both primary and adult education as well as a sports program to their Somali neighbors. EMM staff has continued to volunteer at the Fellowship Center, particularly in adult education and sports. These programs have targeted residents of Eastleigh in general, with most participants being ethnic Somali refugees.

In the years preceding this project, the East Africa regional representative for EMM was Debbie DiGennaro. Based in Nairobi, she oversaw the work of a small team of EMM staff scattered across Kenya and the neighboring countries. I had connected with the team through their work at the Fellowship Center in Eastleigh and had known Mrs. DiGennaro for some time when she sponsored this project in early 2019.

The Project

Initially, the needs assessment was designed as a community-based participatory research project (CBPR). This was done both out of ethical considerations and to maximize the

beneficial impact of the study. CBPR "is a methodological approach to research where researchers and community members are actively collaborating on research with the goal of improving community well-being, effecting social justice, and/or improving health." (Cross et al 2014) For this reason, CBPR is especially appropriate when working with marginalized communities such as Somali Bantu refugees in Kenya. Rather than extracting information from the community for the benefit of the researcher and the funding partners, CBPR enables community members to become part of and exercise control over the research process, generating information beneficial for the community. Ideally, CBPR involves community participation at every stage of the research process: designing the project and developing research questions, collecting and analyzing data, and finally in disseminating the findings. By placing control over the research process and the findings into the hands of the community, CBPR "aligns well with decolonizing methodologies." (Stanton 2013)

In designing this project as community-based and participatory, the goal of the project became twofold: On the one hand there were the deliverables agreed upon with EMM as the sponsor of the study. On the other hand, the study was intended to (1) provide the Somali Bantu community in Nairobi with useful information to improve their situation and (2) use the participatory research process to facilitate community dynamics of community development and activism. In order to achieve these goals, the study was designed to include the following participatory elements:

1) An initial townhall meeting for members of the Somali Bantu community in Nairobi. The meeting was intended to (a) inform community members about the research project, receive suggestions regarding the research design, and address concerns, (b) allow the community to choose an oversight committee that would monitor the research process, enable participants to voice grievances, and control the

dissemination of findings, and (c) to identify community members willing to join the research team.

2) Assembling a research team of community members to receive basic training in the research methods used and to participate in data collection, analysis, and presentation.

3) A final townhall meeting for the community in which findings would be presented and made available to the community, and action steps based on these findings discussed.

I approached my Somali Bantu contacts during the initial design phase of the project in February 2019 and explained the study to them. Their response was positive, both in seeing the value of the study as such and in agreeing with the participatory nature of the design. They proceeded to contact other community members and to organize a first townhall meeting without my presence, during which the plan should be discussed and the way forward decided. This first meeting was attended by around 50 Somali Bantu men and women, and the result was an initial endorsement of the project plan. However, as I was to find out later, the Somali Bantu community in Nairobi was not organized in any way and there were no recognized leaders. The people who came together for the first meeting chose four community members (3 men and 1 woman) as 'leaders' to form a temporary committee and oversee the project. Nevertheless, it was my initial contacts who organized the second townhall meeting in mid-March, during which I was asked to present the project to the community. There was a brief time to ask questions, and then the people present (around 60 in number) decided to endorse the project and give me permission to proceed. It was also at this meeting that I was introduced to the oversight committee and to several community members who were interested in joining the research team. In addition, the organizer of the meeting passed around a sign-up sheet

where people could register as potential interview participants. This was done on their initiative.

Once I had the buy-in of the community, I next sought approval for the project with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at UNT. It was the first time I had done an IRB application and the process took longer than I had expected. The application was submitted in early June and approved at the end of July, 2019. By that time, I was ready to stat data collection, only to discovered that the lives of many community members were too transient to keep their interest through the design and approval stage. Several of the most interested people had either found a job and were busy, or had moved out of Nairobi altogether. The person who had played a key role in organizing the townhall meetings was frustrated with the delay and no longer interested in the project and the committee that formed in February was effectively disbanded.

I began to recognize the difficulty of doing a community-based study when there was very little sense of community within the population. While the Somali Bantu I interacted with had a clear sense of ethnic identity and many were connected to Somali Bantu communities in the refugee camps or in Somalia, all agreed that there was no organized or structured community in Nairobi. This meant that while I could work together with individual community members, I was at a loss as to how to involve Somali Bantus in the research project at a community level. At the completion of the project, I was unable to find anybody interested in organizing another townhall meeting to present the findings. However, my continued involvement with Somali Bantu refugees in Nairobi after the study meant that I could disseminate and use findings on an individual level with a number of community members. In

addition, the research process and particularly the townhall meetings had started dynamics of community-building that I didn't become aware off until much later. At the writing of this thesis in early 2021, a number of young Somali Bantus in Nairobi (several of which had been involved in the design of the study) had come together to start a community association with elected leaders, and were in the planning to register their origination with the Kenyan authorities. While it is difficult to gauge the extent to which the needs assessment contributed to these developments, it is my hope that the participatory element of this study contributed in the positive developments now visible within the Somali Bantu community in Nairobi.

The needs assessment was also designed to be ethnographic and exploratory. While there was significant literature on both the situation of refugees in Nairobi and on the Somali Bantu people in general, there was no data available as to the size or structure of the Somali Bantu community in Nairobi. As a needs assessment, the study had to be designed very broad and open ended, as health and educational needs would vary significantly based on age and gender distribution in the population. The holistic approach of ethnography was well suited to this kind of exploratory study. Additionally, it was also exactly the kind of study EMM was looking for. As the organization didn't have any program targeting Somali Bantu at the time, the goal was to explore the needs of the community so as to be able to design programs that were evidence-based and relevant. I had agreed with my sponsor on the following deliverables: (1) a short written report, (2) a verbal presentation to EMM staff and partners.

In the course of the study, EMM underwent several significant changes in East Africa. For one, my contact person, Mrs. DiGennaro, decided to leave Kenya at the end of 2019 and end her work with the organization shortly afterwards. EMM was unable to find a replacement

for her position, and without the role of regional representative being filled, the oversight over the work in East Africa reverted back to the Mission's Team Director, a US-based role that had only recently been filled with Lorrie Bentch. The reduced direct oversight in the region resulted in a hiring stop for EMM staff in Kenya and a reduction in the existing work. The implications for my project was that I needed to deliver the results before the end of 2019 and that it was unclear whether EMM would be able to follow up on them in any way.

The week of my presentation in mid-December, Mrs. Bentch came to Nairobi for a brief visit. Both she and Mrs. DiGennaro attended the presentation and were quite satisfied with the results of my study. I was able to continue the conversation with Mrs. Bentch the following year to explore ways for EMM to act on my findings. In addition, Mrs. DiGennaro had invited staff from several partner organizations and disseminated the report to these partners. Thus, the presentation of the findings resulted in a conversation between a number of organizations working with refugees in the Nairobi area.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Forced Migration

Introduction

Though anthropology as a discipline developed in the beginning of the 20th century, it wasn't until the 1980s that forced migrants as recognized as an important field of study. While many anthropologists had been researching populations that had been massively affected by forced migration (Native Americans in the US, colonialized groups in Africa), the theoretical perspective of early anthropology made those experiences largely invisible and researchers attempted to reconstruct imagined stable societies of the past or, at best, document the slow processes of modernization. As Castro (2020) points out, structural functionalism was not well suited to addressing drastic social change or ongoing violent conflict. One notable exception was the work of Elizabeth Colson, who researched Japanese-Americans in internment camps during the second world war and from 1946 onwards studied development-induced displacement among the Tonga in southern Africa (Chatty 2014).

New theoretical paradigms that gained popularity within anthropology in the 1960s and 1970s provided the needed perspective to better conceptualize forced migration. Victor Turner introduced the concept of liminality (Turner 1967) and, more generally, symbolic anthropology to the discipline, which enabled anthropologists to understand the experiences of refugees. Critical anthropology with its focus on political economy (Wolf 1982), turned the gaze of anthropologists on the structures and practices of power that constitute the refugee regime, the organizations and institutions that govern and manage forced migrants.

Equipped with these new tools, anthropologists took up the field of forced migration in the 1980s. In Europe, Barbara Harrell-Bond established the Refugee Studies Centre (initially as the Refugee Studies Programme) at the University of Oxford in 1982 and served as its director until 1996. Under her leadership, the center became the focal point of scholarship on forced migration and has been publishing the *Journal of Refugee Studies* since 1988. Harrell-Bond recognized the need for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of refugees and included political scientists, legal scholars and other academics into the core of the program (Chatty 2014). During her fieldwork among Ugandan refugees in South Sudan in the early 1980s, Harrell-Bond had turned her focus on the structures and practices of the humanitarian organizations assisting the refugees, resulting in a critique of the refugee regime in her seminal book *Imposing Aid: Emergency Assistance to Refugees* (1986). During this same time period, the American Anthropological Association recognized the importance of forced migration with the establishment of the Committee on Refugees and Immigrants (CORI) within the General Anthropology Division (Lewellen 2002).

The 1990s saw a drastic expansion in the study of refugees caused by new refugee-producing crises (for example, in Yugoslavia, Somalia, and Rwanda), but also by an increased theoretical focus on mobility and transformation with the work of Arjun Appadurai (1996) on globalization, as well as the deconstruction of culture by Akhil Gupta, and James Ferguson (1992). Liisa Malkki (1992, 1995) introduced Gupta and Ferguson's social constructivism and Appadurai's concept of the social imaginary into the field of refugee studies, resulting in a vigorous debate on territorialization and the 'sedentarist' bias within academia. Based on her fieldwork conducted among Hutu refugees in Tanzania, she argued that the link between

people, cultures and territory is socially constructed rather than naturally given, as was long assumed by anthropology. In exile, refugees create imagined communities based on imagined homelands as powerful uniting symbols (Chatty 2014).

Another concept that received increased attention during the 1990s was transnationalism. While theorizing globalization focused on the macro-level of global cultural and economic flows, the perspective of transnationalism brought these flows to bear on the micro-level in the lives of migrants and their communities. Thus, it provided a powerful way to conceptualize social networks and identities of refugees across national borders (Brettel 2000). Transnationalism continues to be a key concept in the study of forced migrants.

Since the turn of the century, the number of anthropologists studying refugees and other forced migrants has increase significantly, and the field has broadened to encompass virtually every part of the world and every aspect of forced migration (Chatty 2014).

A fundamental and recurrent theme within the anthropology of refugees and migrants concerns the legitimacy of refugee studies as a field in itself, and the relation to the broader field of migration studies. Anthropologists of migration have tended to view refugees as simply one form of migrants (Brettel 2000), addressed within the sub-field of forced migration. Other scholars have argued that refugees as a group are distinct enough to warrant their own category and field of study (Hathaway 2007). The dilemma at the core of this debate is that 'refugee' is defined as a legal status conferred by the UNHCR and government agencies, rather than the description of a social reality as studied by anthropologists. Consequently, there are many different experiences found within the category of refugee, some of which are very similar to those of other migrants, while on the other side many migrants who might qualify as

refugees under other circumstances are denied that status by host governments. Over the last decades especially, the category has become more politicized and at the same time more fragmentized, leading to new labels and fewer refugees (Zetter 2007).

Responding to this fragmentation of forced migrants, anthropologists have expanded their gaze beyond refugees to other categories such as undocumented immigrants (de Leon 2015, Anderson 2014), asylum seekers (Fassin and D'Halluin 2005, Heath Cabot 2012), or internally displaced people (Kett 2005, Duncan 2005, Whyte et al. 2013). Others have studied differences between refugee sub-groups such as camp vs urban refugees (Agier 2002, Oka 2011), those resettled into third countries (Eastmond 2011, Fozdar and Hartley 2013) or those repatriated to their home country (Hammond 2004, Ecke et al. 2016). And yet other anthropologists have looked at how refugees themselves navigate the various labels both in the re-interpretation of their social identities and in their interactions with various government and humanitarian agencies (Peteet 2005).

Rather than delving into the literature on forced migration in anthropology in general, the following section reviews relevant literature on refugees in Kenya.

Refugees in Kenya

Kenya has hosted refugees for a long time and has signed both the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention on the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa. However, the government did not pass any national legislation on refugees until the Refugee Act of 2006; before that, refugees in Kenya lived in a legal limbo and were governed by policy, rather than by law (Nanima 2017). These policies were initially generous and hospitable to refugees, giving them the right to reside in urban areas and move freely throughout the

country, access education opportunities and apply for work permits. The Kenyan government determined refugee status on an individual basis through the Kenyan Eligibility Committee, while the UNHCR and foreign NGOs played a negligible role in the administration of refugees (Verdirame 1999).

In 1991-1992 Kenya saw a huge influx of refugees from conflicts in Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, and especially Somalia. The refugee population increased from just 12,000 in 1990 to 120,000 in 1991 and over 400,000 in 1992 (Campbell 2005). Overwhelmed by these numbers, government policies changed drastically. Unable to continue individual status determinations and unwilling to integrate all these refugees into urban society, the Kenyan government decided that refugees were to reside in camps administered by the UNHCR and serviced by international NGOs. This meant an influx of foreign resources to aid refugees, but it also increased the legal vacuum for refugees as the government stopped its own refugee status determinations. The UNHCR took over the process and made the decisions on who was and who wasn't a refugee. Recognized refugees were provided with a 'protection letter' as the only form of identification (Verdirame 1999).

The majority of refugees arriving in Kenya in 1991-1992 came from neighboring Somalia, where a civil war had overthrown the central government before disintegrating into clan-based warfare between competing warlords. Refugees either arrived over land at the Somali-Kenyan border, or via boat at the coastal city of Mombasa. Most of those arriving by sea were inhabitants of Somalia's coastal cities and many belonged to minority groups. They were settled in several camps in the Mombasa area, and many quickly integrated into the local economy (Verdirame 1999). Many of those arriving at the land border came from rural areas and

agricultural or nomadic backgrounds. The UNHCR established three camps around the small town of Dadaab in Northeastern province, an arid part of the country inhabited by ethnic Somalis. In addition, a refugee camp was set up next to Kakuma town in Turkana province in northwestern Kenya for refugees arriving from Sudan, and later in the 1990s for refugees from Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Between 1994-1997 the Kenyan government closed the camps around Mombasa and declared that all refugees should be relocated to either Dadaab or Kakuma. Most ethnic Somalis were taken to Dadaab, while members of minority groups who felt threatened by majority clans there were instead relocated to Kakuma. Thousands of refugees refused either option and instead self-settled into coastal communities where they already had ethnic or social connections (Verdirame 1999).

During the 1990s, Kenya became increasingly inhospitable for refugees, with few opportunities for integration and rising levels of xenophobia. Refugees were supposed to stay in remote camps, and the government did not officially recognize the existence of urban refugees, labeling them instead 'illegal aliens'. In 1997, the police followed a presidential directive against 'spies and criminals' to crack down on the refugee community in Nairobi, arbitrarily arresting and detaining hundreds. After the 1998 bombing of the US-embassy in Nairobi by al-Qaida, government operations against refugees in the name of national security became more frequent, with over 600 refugees arrested in 1999 and over 1,000 refugees in 2002 (Campbell 2005).

The 21st century saw two parallel developments regarding refugees in Kenya. On the one hand, the 2006 Refugee Act and the 2010 Constitution increased the rights of refugees. The Refugee Act ratified the international conventions and thus allowed refugees freedom of

movement and the right to apply for work permits. It also established the Department of Refugee Affairs (Nanima 2017). The 2010 Constitution provided for a pathway to permanent residency and citizenship to refugees who had legally resided in Kenya for more than 7 years.

On the other hand, the global war on terror after 9/11 increased the securitization of the refugee regime. Without a functioning government, war-torn Somalia had become a haven for terrorists and organized criminals and the Kenyan government had legitimate concerns regarding security threats from Somalia. These increased after the emergence of the al-Shabaab terrorist group in Somalia in 2008, and the infiltration of Muslim communities in Kenya by al-Shabaab in the following years. A number of terrorist attacks in Kenya attributed to al-Shabaab in 2011-14 brought national security to the forefront of public discourse, and refugees from Somalia provided a convenient scapegoat. All of this resulted in presidential directives and government policies that stood in contrast to the provisions of refugee law. Numerous times between 2012 and 2019 the Kenyan government ordered the closure of urban refugee registration centers and the relocation of urban refugees to the camps, as well as the complete closure of the Dadaab refugee camps. Most of these directives were struck down in court, but the result has been considerable legal ambiguity and administrative chaos (Namani 2017, Freeman 2019, Balakian 2020). In 2016, the government disbanded the Department of Refugee Affairs on short notice and replaced it with the Refugee Affairs Secretariat (RAS). It also revoked the right of UNHCR to conduct refugee status determinations and instructed RAS to implement refugee registration and status determination, resulting in new and confusing procedures and documentation. Since then, asylum seekers in urban centers have been registered there, but

subsequently ordered to move to Kakuma or Dadaab camps for status determination (NRC & IHRC 2017).

The situation of refugees from Somalia is complicated by the fact that Kenya is home to a sizeable Somali population indigenous to northeastern Kenya. The largest Kenyan Somali clans are also found in southern Somalia and eastern Ethiopia, with transnational social and economic networks going back generations. As a result, many Somali refugees in Kenya have local relatives or clan members who can offer support and facilitate integration. In fact, refugees who are members of Somali clans found in Kenya are often able to acquire Kenyan national ID cards through local government officials from their clan. In return, some impoverished Kenyan Somalis have obtained refugee documentation to benefit from the aid provided by the refugee regime (Horst 2006). As a consequence, even legitimate documentation of Kenyan Somalis is often viewed with suspicion and Kenyan Somalis are targeted as 'illegal immigrants' and security threats (Lochery 2012, Scharrer 2018, Mohamed 2017). On the other hand, common clan membership has facilitated many successful business partnerships between Somali refugees and Kenyan Somalis, where refugees benefit from the legal privileges and the social capital of Kenyan Somalis, who in turn capitalize on the transnational networks refugees bring with them to access global supply chains and new markets. A number of studies on the economic activities of Somalis in Kenya include both refugees and nationals and analyze the economic relationships between both groups. (Elliott 2014, Carrier & Lochery 2013, Carrier 2017, Carrier & Scharrer 2019).

Kenya's refugee camps have received significant attention from academic and applied scholars, including those writing from the vantage of anthropology. Critical studies of the

refugee regime have focused on violence and insecurity (Crisp 2000, Newhouse 2015, Wirtz 2017) as well as policing and managing of refugees (Jaji 2011, Brankamp 2019). Others have studied the strategies refugees employ vis a vis the refugee regime in the construction of vulnerability (Jansen 2008, Perouse de Montclos 2008) and the assertion of dignity (Oka 2014). There has been increased interest in the economics of Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps (Perouse de Montclos 2000, Horst 2006 IFC 2018) as well as economic strategies employed by refugees (Tegenbos and Büscher 2017, Betts et al 2020) and refugee-host relationships (Aukot 2003). A few studies have looked at the marginalization (Iazzolino 2020) and persecution (Adelman 2005) of minority groups by other refugees.

If anything, urban refugees in Nairobi have drawn even more scholars. Despite the numbers of urban refugees being significantly lower than those of camp refugees (80,000 vs 415,000 UNHCR registered refugees in mid-2020), and the fact that urban refugees are more difficult to identify and access, there is no lack of both academic and applied publications on Nairobi's refugees. With very little support from the UNHCR or NGOs, these refugees are generally self-settled and more or less self-reliant. A number of studies focus on survival strategies (Hough 2013, Boeynik 2017), structural vulnerability (Tippens 2017, Muhereza 2012, Wagacha and Guiney 2008) and legal barriers (Balakian 2016, Clapier & Winterø 2015, Pavanello et al 2010). Other studies cover the economic situation (Lindley 2007, Carrier & Elliot 2018, Campbell 2006, UNHCR 2012) and healthcare (IOM 2013, Arnold et al 2014, Im et al 2017, Mutiso et al 2018). Most of these studies focus on the Somali refugees in Eastleigh, by far the largest urban refugee population in Kenya.

Somali Bantu Refugees

Introduction

The anthropology of Somalia began with I.M. Lewis, a British social anthropologist who conducted fieldwork for the Colonial Office in British Somaliland in the late 1950s. Working within a structural-functionalist perspective (he was a student of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown), he focused on traditional political systems of the Somali, published in his book *A Pastoral Democracy* (1961). Lewis went on to become the preeminent scholar of Somali Studies, writing dozens of books and articles on Somali history, society, culture, and religion. While Lewis wrote on Somalis in southern Somalia, Kenya, and Ethiopia, his research primarily focused on northern Somalia (currently: Somaliland), and he has been accused of writing with a northern bias. His strong functionalist emphasis on the Somali clan system was eventually met with severe criticism, especially after his analysis of Somali society was used to explain the civil war in terms of clan warfare (Besteman 1996a).

Lewis' student Virginia Luling followed in his footsteps, conducting her dissertational research in the 1960s in Afgoye, a town in southern Somalia, and becoming a respected scholar of Somali and Oromo studies, as well as a fierce advocate for minority groups in Africa and an expert witness in many Somali asylum cases. Her fieldwork in southern Somalia had brought her in contact with marginalized groups, and in 1983 Luling published an article on minority groups in Somalia, providing a brief overview of the different groups and attempting to reconstruct their history (Luling 1983). However, Luling did not attempt to critically analyze the structures of oppression or the social impact of marginalization on these minority groups.

In the 1980s, Bernhard Helander, a Swedish anthropologist, studied the Rahanweyn

clans of the Baay region in southern Somalia. Like Luling, he came to observe low-status groups integrated into these clans, which he estimated to account for up to 30% of the Rahanweyn clan federation of southern Somalia (Helander 1995). However, he didn't focus his research on these minority groups, possibly because his theoretical perspective aligned too closely with Lewis, as Besteman (1999) contends.

This perspective was challenged in the late 1980s with three dissertational projects focused on the Juba river region in southern Somalia: The anthropologists Francesca Declich (1992) and Catherine Besteman (1991) and the political scholar Ken Menkhaus (1989) all studied the minority groups that later became known as the Somali Bantu. Their close connection with these communities just a few years before the outbreak of the Somali civil war in 1991 shaped their careers in significant ways, and all three have continued to research and publish on the Somali Bantu people.

Catherine Besteman, in particular, framed her research within the theoretical perspective of critical theory, focusing on social stratification on the basis of race and class (Besteman 1999a). Her articles on the social and political collapse of Somalia in the 1990s were very critical of Lewis' clan-based perspective and received a heated backlash from both Lewis and Helander. The ensuing debate (Besteman 1996b, 1998, 1999b, Lewis 1998, 2000, Helander 1998) lasted through the end of the decade and ended with harsh personal attacks on Besteman by Lewis, who he described as "very ignorant, extremely pretentious, and totally lacking in serious scholarship" (Geshekter 2000).

By this time, scholarship on Somalia had shifted significantly, with a new generation of social scientists (both Somali and non-Somali) embracing what Lewis saw as "the most negative

influences in anthropology", namely Marxism and post-modernism (Geshekter 2000). Two edited volumes, *The Invention of Somalia* (Ahmed 1995) and *The Struggle for Land in Southern Somalia* (Besteman and Cassanelli 1996) contained an interdisciplinary collection of articles calling for a reinterpretation of the social processes that led to the civil war in Somalia as well as revision of the 'myths' created by Western scholarship about Somali history and society. While many of these scholars appreciated Besteman's contribution to the field, few completely agreed with her conclusions on the role of race in Somalia (Abdi 2000, Kapteijns 2001).

Ali Jimale Ahmed, Abdi M. Kusow, and Mohamed Haji Mukhtar are among the Somali scholars who contributed to *The Invention of Somalia*, although not from an anthropological perspective. All three come from southern Somalia and are critical of the 'northern' bias of scholars like Lewis, a bias that can be found among Somali academics, as well. In 2001, for example, Mohamed Diriye Abdullahi, a Somali linguist, published the popular *Culture and Customs of Somalia*, a book that is written very much from an egalitarian, clan-based northern perspective and barely acknowledges the existence of southern minority groups.

While Besteman (2016), Declich (2020), and Menkhaus (2010) continue to publish work regarding the Somali Bantu groups of the Juba River, the cause of the Somali minority groups has been championed most passionately by two of their own, Omar A. Eno and Mohamed A. Eno, two brothers who ran a ESL school in Mogadishu during the 1980s before fleeing the country and subsequently pursuing academic careers. The late Omar Eno was a historian and faculty member at Portland State University, where he co-published *The Somali Bantu: Their Culture and History* (2003). Mohamed Eno is an educator and faculty member at ADNOC Technical College in Abu Dhabi, as well as professor of African Studies at St. Clemens University

Somalia and a prolific author of academic articles on the situation of the Somali Bantu minority groups.

The Somali Bantu

Although Somali society has been called homogenous, egalitarian, and democratic, there are actually several layers of social stratification. The most obvious one is the clan structure. Somalis are organized into clans through patrilineal descent in a system I. M. Lewis calls a segmentary lineage-based society. On a practical level, the smallest social unit is the 'jiffo-paying unit', which includes all the descendants of a common ancestor 3-4 generations back. The next larger significant unit is the 'diya-paying unit', a descent group of around several thousand members. Above these are the primary lineages, the clans, and finally, the clan-families. The smaller units are bound together by social contract (*xeer*) to support each other. Larger units, such as the clan, are important on the level of state or national politics (Lewis 1994).

The clan system is one of the most important social resources for individuals in daily life. These days, most diya-paying units are organized into social media groups to keep each other informed of important events or needs among group members. In many cases, regular fees are collected to take care of the most destitute; additionally, the diya-paying group is mobilized in emergencies (e.g. to cover medical bills or funeral costs) and to make economic investments. In the context of the Somali civil war, both the diya-paying groups and entire clans (numbering hundreds of thousands of members) are crucial for physical protection, with larger clans operating heavily armed militias.

Within this system, belonging to a small clan comes with serious disadvantages. While

some small clans are very prestigious and have a high social status (for example, the religious clans of the Ashraaf and Sheykhaal), during the height of the civil war in the 1990s, members of small clans were disproportionately targeted by violent criminal gangs, regardless of their status. Members of smaller clans can also experience more difficulties in raising funds or finding assistance within their clan networks (OCHA 2002).

These disadvantages become even more pronounced for those who do not fit into the clan system at all. Many of the Somali Bantu living along the Shabelle and lower Juba rivers form their own social groups and are not members of any Somali clan. The same is true for some of the low-caste occupational groups scattered across Somalia and for the traditional urban populations of the ancient cities of southern Somalia (e.g. the Reer Hamar and the Bravanese). These groups have been called *looma ooye* ("the ones no one cries for") by other Somalis as a sign of their lack of social and military support (MRGI & IIDA 2015).

While the clan system is codified in traditional Somali law, two other important social distinctions function on a less formal level. One is based on a concept of purity and divides Somalis into 'noble' and 'commoner' (these are terms used within the academic literature, although I was not able to find a Somali term for 'commoner'; instead, nobility is juxtaposed simply with a lack of nobility). While most Somalis consider themselves as noble, many clans contains entire lineages who are low-caste because they are considered ritually impure. In many cases, their impurity is explained through legends in which the ancestor of the lineage broke some kind of taboo, often by eating food that was forbidden. Traditionally, intermarriage between nobles and commoners is forbidden, and in many cases this practice is still enforced on a family level (Menkhaus 2003).

The third social distinction in Somalia is a racial one. Somali society differentiates two different racial categories based on physical features. The term *jileec* ('soft') refers to the soft curly hair found among most Somalis and related groups in the Horn of Africa, while *jareer* ('hard') denotes the harder, more kinky hair common among some of the Somali minority groups as well as most East Africans. Thus, Somali racial categories are not primarily based on skin color (there are some Somali groups referred to as 'white', but darker skin does not connote a different social status) but on hair texture, as well as on facial features (round vs long faces and thin vs broad noses) associated with 'hard-hair' and 'soft-hair' people (Besteman 1999).

Ken Menkhaus estimates the percentage of the *jareer* population at 5%-10% of the entire population of Somalia (Menkhaus 2010), constituting the largest minority group in the country. However, this minority group is by no means homogenous, and traditionally there has not been a common ethnic identity among the various *jareer* groups scattered across southern Somalia. Three main categories of *jareer* can be distinguished, although these categories should not be viewed being static or having clear-cut boundaries.

The first group of *jareer* are those who belong to a Somali clan. As Helander noted in the 1980s, most clans of southern Somalia contain some lineages who are considered to be *jareer*. In some cases, these lineages even make up the majority of the clan, as with the Eelay around Baidoa, or constitute an entire clan within the Rahanweyn clan federation, as with the Gobaweyn of Luuq or the Eyle of Buur Hakaba. Belonging to a Somali clan, these groups are more integrated into majority Somali society than others. The clan system places certain obligations on them, but also afford a certain measure of protection and support. Nevertheless,

they are not viewed as ethnic Somalis by their fellow clan members, and in the early years of civil war aid workers noticed that these *jareer* lineages were severely discriminated against in the distribution of food, with many starving to death as a result (Menkhaus 2003).

The second group of *jareer* are those found along the Shabelle River in southern Somalia. They live in distinct communities with their own ethnic identities, such as the *Makanne*, the *Shiidle*, or the *Shabelle*. Traditionally, these communities have existed in patron-client relationships with the surrounding Somali clans. They speak the dialects of their Somali neighbors and many individuals have migrated to nearby urban centers, particularly to the capital Mogadishu. However, these groups generally with themselves as the initial inhabitants of southern Somalia and speak of the Somali clans as arriving later. Some scholars have speculated that these *jareer* communities form the northernmost expansion of the Bantu peoples from central Africa, or that they were part of the legendary precolonial Bantu kingdom of *Shungwaya* (located somewhere in southern Somalia). However, as these groups have no memory of ever speaking a Bantu language, they generally dislike being called Somali Bantu (Eno & Kusow 2014).

The third group of *jareer* are the communities found along the lower Juba river of Somalia, primarily around the towns of Jilib and Jamaame, in a forested area called *gosha*. The inhabitants of the *gosha* are unique in that they are able to trace their ancestry to a number of Bantu-speaking groups in East Africa countries such as Tanzania and Mozambique. The ancestors of these communities were brought to Somalia in the 19th century as part of the Arab slave trade. Enslaved to Somali masters, they were forced to work in the cities of the Banadir region and on plantations along the lower Shabelle river during a time when southern Somalia

experienced increased integration into the global capitalist economy. Starting in the 1840s, freed or escaped East African slaves settled in the remote area of the *gosha*, where they organized themselves into agricultural villages based primarily on ethnic affiliation. In the late 19th century, these villages formed a confederation called the *Shanta Shabarra* under the leadership of the legendary Nassib Bundo, able to resist the raids of neighboring nomadic clans and eventually rising to be a valuable trading partner within the network of East African coastal cities (Declich 2020).

Menkhaus (2003) and Besteman (1999) documented a history of discrimination and disenfranchisement faced by these ex-slave communities as the Lower Juba region became more integrated into the Somali state during the 20th century and the Somali elites began to recognize the value of the agricultural land held by them. Underdevelopment and dispossession turned into horrific violence in the early years of the civil war. Many thousand *jareer* villagers fled across the desert into neighboring Kenya with traumatic accounts of killings, sexual violence, and starvation. Most of these refugees were received by Kenyan authorities and placed in the Dadaab camps of Eastern Kenya, where they again ended up as a minority group among ethnic Somalis. Dan van Lehman and other UNHCR officials in the camp noticed the continued racial discrimination these minorities experienced in the Dadaab camps and began to advocate for special protection. It was as this point that the term Somali Bantu was first coined to signify *jareer* refugees from Somalia. Through the advocacy of Van Lehman and others, the United States government recognized the Somali Bantu as a vulnerable minority group and granted resettlement status to the entire community. Between 2003 and 2006, 12,000 Somali Bantu refugees were resettled to the US in one of the largest group resettlement programs. But

many other stayed behind – some because they did not neatly fit into the racialized stereotypes of Somali and UN workers alike, others because more influential Somali refugees corruptly obtained their resettlement places within the UNHCR bureaucracy, and yet others because they had self-settled along the Kenyan coast or returned to their homes in Somalia (Besteman 2016).

Several scholars have analyzed the construction of the ethnic identity of the Somali Bantu through the experience of forced displacement and encampment (Declich, 2000, Menkhaus 2010, Besteman 2012). The Somali Bantu label was quickly recognized as a valuable resource vis a vis the humanitarian regime, increasing chances of special protection and third-country resettlement, and from its initial use in the refugee camps, the label has now spread back to the IDP camps of Somalia. Among many refugees in Kenya and among those resettled in the US, however, being Somali Bantu is no longer just a label, but an ethnic identity. Nevertheless, this identity is somewhat ambiguous, and especially the *jareer* groups who do not remember a Bantu ancestry are reluctant to adopt it. Instead, the term *jareer*, which is primarily used in a derogatory by ethnic Somalis, has been reappropriated by many in the community as a self-identifier and filled with positive connotations. Some of the community leaders now speak of belonging to the *Jareerweyne* (the *jareer* nation). Somali Bantu scholars Omar Eno and Mohamed Eno have used both terms side by side ("Bantu Jareer Somalis") to include both groups (Eno 2008, Eno et al 2010).

Somali Bantu Studies

With the arrival of 12,000 Somali Bantu refugees in the US, scholars across many disciplines started to study this community. Some focused on the initial resettlement experience and the process of integration (Waweru 2008, Baker 2008, Sekhon 2008, Smith

2010, Frounfelker et al 2017) or on identity formation (Deramo 2016, 2018, Bjork 2016, Shapiro & MacDonald 2017) and the memories of trauma and loss (Ghazali 2010). A number of studies were done from an educational perspective, focusing on the challenges and barriers faced by Somali Bantu children (Roxas 2008, 2010, Roy 2008, Roy & Roxas 2011, Roxas & Roy 2012, Birman & Tran 2015, 2017) and on ESL and literacy among adults (Colleen 2006, Lynch 2009, Dyer 2016). Healthcare proved to be another important focus (Springer 2010, Julie 2011, Deckys & Springer 2013, Beatson 2013, Schuster et al 2019, Assefa et al 2020), often with an emphasis on reproductive healthcare among women (Shamalla-Hannah 2007, Upvall et al 2009, Brown et al, Gurnah et al 2011, Feresu & Smith 2013, Agbemenu 2017), on health education (Eisenhauer et al 2012, Jacoby et al 2015), or on mental health (Baker 2007, Frounfelker et al 2020). Other studies included issues of parenting (Reinke 2010, Bailey 2020) and adolescence (Grady 2015), on economic self-sufficiency (Smith 2012, 2013), and on human rights (Coughlan et al 2015, Van Lehman & McKee 2019). As there were no significant Somali Bantu refugee communities in other Western countries, these publications all focus on the US.

In contrast to the situation in the US, there are few studies on Somali Bantu refugees in Kenya or on the Somali Bantu community in Somalia. Although Somali Bantus make up a significant portion of IDPs in the urban camps of Mogadishu, Kismayo, and other cities of southern Somalia, security concerns make academic studies virtually impossible. A notable exception is the work of Somali Bantu scholar Mohamed Eno, who conducted fieldwork throughout southern Somalia for his dissertation (Eno 2005) as well as for subsequent articles (Eno 2014, Eno & Eno 2010). Other academic work generally relies on interviews with Somali Bantus in neighboring countries (Hoehne 2014) or the US (Besteman 2016) Applied research in

Somalia that includes Somali Bantus as a significant minority group has been conducted by government agencies (DIS 2000), the United Nations (OCHA 2002) and non-governmental organizations (Hill 2010, 2015, Beanstead et al. 2019).

In Kenya, Francesca Declich documented the process of identity formation among Somali Bantu refugees (Declich 2000), as well as the resettlement of Somali Bantus with Tanzanian ancestry in Tanzania (Declich 2010, 2018). In a recent article, Gianluca Iazzolino documented the relationship between Somalis and Somali Bantus in the Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya (Iazzolino 2020), giving a detailed account of the marginalization and domination experienced by Somali Bantu refugees during his fieldwork in 2013-2014. Iazzolino's research included a significant number of interviews with Somali Bantus in Nairobi; unfortunately he does not provide any information regarding their situation there. He merely mentions that is was common among Somali Bantu refugees to send "the breadwinner of the family, typically the most common young male, to travel to urban centres, usually Eastleigh, where they would hope to find a job and send remittances back to their families in the camp." (2020:22) In addition to these remittances, camp-based family members were also able to sell or trade the food rations intended for this person (2020:23).

Considering the breadth of the literature on refugees in Kenya generally, and Somali refugees in particular, the relative paucity of Somali Bantu studies is striking. Studies focused on the Dadaab or Kakuma camps will at least mention the minority group and might devote a short section to them (Crisp 1999, Jansen 2008, Grayson-Courtemanche, IFC 2018, Ikanda 2018). Considering the fact that Somali Bantus constitute a very significant portion of the population of these refugee camps (Menkhaus 2017), their marginalization in the literature is puzzling. In

Nairobi, the numbers of Somali Bantu are much smaller, and publications on urban refugees generally make no mention of Somali Bantu at all (e.g. Campbell 2006, NRC 2017, Im et al 2017). It is this gap in the literature that this thesis is addressing.

CHAPTER 3

PROJECT DESIGN

Timeline

I was in Nairobi from January 2019 until March 2020, and during that entire time I was interacting with the Somali Bantu community. EMM asked me to conduct the needs assessment at the end of January, shortly after I had reconnected with some Somali Bantu contacts I had made in Fall 2017. I approached the Somali Bantu community in February, and in March the community organized a townhall meeting and endorsed the research project. In April and May I finalized the research proposal and designed the interview questions. The IRB application was submitted in early June and approved at the end of July. Data collection took place in August and September, and data analysis was completed in October and November. The report was written in early December and the presentation to the client took place in mid-December 2019.

In January 2020, I unsuccessfully attempted to organize a community event to disseminate the findings. Instead, I shared the information with several key contact in the community. That month, I also was invited to a meeting with a group of Somali elders who identified as community leaders for the entire Kenyan Somali Bantu community. They were based in the refugee camps but had come to Nairobi for a short visit. I was able to share some of my findings and discuss some ideas for future collaboration.

Although systematic data collection for the thesis took place during the months of August and September, this data is placed within the wider context of interacting with the Somali Bantu community over a timeframe of 13 months. This contextual information aided in analysis, making it possible to verify some of the data and identify limitations.

Research Population and Sampling Methods

Somali Bantu refugees in Nairobi constitute a hidden population, a term that "euphemistically refers to those who are disadvantaged and disenfranchised: the homeless and transient, chronically mentally ill, high school dropouts, criminal offenders, prostitutes, juvenile delinquents, gang members, runaways, and other street people" (Lambert & Wiebel 1990). Many Somali Bantus do not have the legal documents authorizing them to live in Nairobi, so they rarely seek out services from the government or nongovernmental organizations. They also try to avoid confrontations with the police by blending in and staying out of sight. Because of their comparatively low numbers and their social and economic disenfranchisement, Somali Bantus in Nairobi don't have social spaces that work as focal points for the community. Furthermore, my initial contacts assured me that while they had "many friends" who were Somali Bantu, there was no community organization or leadership in the city.

Bernard (2011) describes purposive sampling and respondent-driven sampling as methods often used to research hard-to-reach populations. In respondent-driven sampling (RDS), the research finds a few initial informants who act as 'seeds' by recommending or referring people from their social networks for additional interviews. These may in turn refer their contacts, creating 'waves' of informants until the desired number of interviews is achieved. Purposive sampling uses various methods of finding study participants, including announcements or presentations as community meetings and selecting participants from personal social networks. However, study participants are selected based on pre-defined criteria, much like in quota sampling. For this study, a combination of RDS and purposive sampling was used. I initially presented the research project to three young men in the

community who were reportedly well-connected. These three in turn invited members of their social networks to a townhall meeting, which was attended by over 60 men and women. During the townhall meeting, I made a presentation and announced the need for study participants. Attendants were then given the opportunity to volunteer for participation in an interview. During data collection, these volunteers were contacted first, but also asked to refer additional contacts from their social networks. This method gave me enough potential participants that I was able to select people purposely based on pre-defined criteria. Based on the information regarding Somali Bantus in the literature, I decided to include roughly equal numbers of participants from ex-slave communities along the Juba river and from indigenous communities along the Shabelle river. For one, I assumed that the difference in origin might result in differences of social and cultural capital. But I also wanted to explore whether the two groups actually formed a single community and how they perceived their differences and similarities. I also decided to include roughly equal numbers of both men and women in the study to make sure I didn't miss out on gendered perspectives of the situation of Somali refugees. In addition, I hoped to include a range of age groups and family status, but because of the lack of demographic data I didn't know if all groups would be sufficiently represented in the community. During the course of data collection, I slightly adjusted my participant criteria based on the information I was gathering to include participants from a more specific subgroups inside Somalia, as well as from different migrant backgrounds (undocumented, camp refugee, urban refugee).

In all, I conducted 20 interviews with Somali Bantu refugees, 9 men and 11 women. Of these, 5 were from ex-slave communities along the Juba river, 8 from distinct communities

along the Shabelle river, and 7 from Bantu segments of Somali clans. Six had come to Nairobi from the Kakuma refugee camps, 2 from the Dadaab camps, and the remaining 12 had arrived through various routes without registering as refugees in Kenya.

While my sampling methods resulted in a diverse sample of interview participants, they did have several significant limitations. For one, all my interview participants lived in Eastleigh. In fact, many of them never left Eastleigh and didn't know anybody outside of the neighborhood. They were under the impression that most if not all Somali Bantu in Nairobi live in Eastleigh. However, after completing the community interviews, I was told of Somali Bantu refugees in Kangemi and in Dandora, two slums in Nairobi. Eastleigh is a major hub for ethnic Somalis in Kenya, and Somalis Bantus living there are somewhat integrated into the larger Somali community. I assume that Somali Bantus in other parts of Nairobi are more integrated into the Kenyan community they live in and not much connected to ethnic Somalis. In omitting these Somali Bantus from my study, I might have missed important needs within the community, as well as significant assets they might be able to contribute.

Secondly, my sample did not include any Somali Bantus with direct family members in the USA. My contacts explained that Somali Bantus were forced to look for work in Nairobi if they didn't receive any remittances from family members abroad. But I later discovered that a number of Somali Bantus come to Nairobi because of their US relatives. I met several young women who were able to live in nicer neighborhoods outside of Eastleigh because their US-based husbands paid for their housing. I also met Somali Bantus who were engaged in business ventures on behalf of relatives abroad. Their situation was significantly different from many of

my interview participants, and a follow-up study might focus on their role within the Somali Bantu community.

In addition to the 20 community interviews, I included 6 interviews with service providers in my study. I wanted to understand what services were available to urban refugees in Nairobi, and learn about the experiences service providers had made with Somali Bantu clients. To identify service providers, I conducted an internet search of nongovernmental organizations serving refugees in Nairobi. I decided to not include the UNHCR or the Kenyan government in my study because I knew from past experiences that these institutions would be very difficult to access. While interviewing service providers, I wasn't exactly 'studying up' since my status as a Western expatriate conferred significant privilege in the world of humanitarian agencies, but I did face a very different set of barriers in identifying and recruiting interview participants. Even though the number of refugee service providers in Nairobi is fairly limited, I ended up using a snowball sampling technique in which interview participants provided me with recommendations and contact details for other organizations. I ended up with a convenience sample of 6 interview participants, all Kenyan nationals, who worked on staff for several different NGOs. This is by no means a representative sample of all the service providers working with refugees in Nairobi, but it did several important case studies as well as added perspective on the community interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

While the majority of my data came from semi-structured interviews, participant observation played an important role, as well. My ability to participate in the Somali Bantu community was very limited and mainly consisted of short visits of homes and workplaces.

Most community interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants and I so was able to observe the living conditions of more than a dozen different community members. My prior working knowledge of Eastleigh provided much background information to put these observations into context.

In the same way, I was not really able to participate in the work of service providers, but the visits to a number of NGOs enabled me to experience some of the access barriers faced by refugee clients. I was also allowed to participate in a food distribution event conducted by one organization to observe the interaction between refugees and staff.

The 20 community interviews and 6 service provider interviews were each about 45-60 minutes long. Each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Community members were interviewed in their homes or in the homes of another community member based on their preference. This meant that some interviews were interrupted by family members or neighbors, and in a few cases family member were present throughout the interview. In each case, privacy and confidentiality concerns were explained and the participant was given the choice to conduct the interview privately or to have others present. Since most interview participants were illiterate and there were cultural reservations regarding written consent forms, informed consent was given verbally. In each case I made sure that there was opportunity to voice concerns and ask questions.

The case was very different with service provider interviews. The participants were highly educated and accustomed to the protocols of humanitarian work. Each participant received a consent form and gave informed consent in writing prior to the interview. The

interviews all took place at the workplace of the participants, either in their personal office or in a private meeting room.

To ensure data confidentiality, the audio recordings and written transcripts were stored on an encrypted computer. After transcription, audio files were destroyed and the written transcripts were anonymized by removing names and other personal information. Files were stored using a numbered system and pseudonyms were used in the deliverables. Only one of the interview participants voiced concerns regarding the content of the interview and seemed guarded regarding the information they were willing to give. For this participant, some questions were omitted to ensure their confidentiality and their comfort during the interview.

The field notes and interview transcripts were analyzed qualitatively using MAXQDA. Notes and interviews were coded based on a code list that was based on the research questions and refined during the coding process. The codes were used to identify and analyze patterns and themes. Field notes, community interviews, and service provider interviews were compared to triangulate the data, and analysis was informed and aided by data from the existing literature and by my prior experiences of working in Eastleigh and interacting with Somali Bantu refugees.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The needs assessment of the Somali Bantu community in Nairobi consisted of two main questions: (1) *What are the needs or challenges faced by Somali Bantu refugees living in Nairobi?* And: (2) *What are the existing services provided by NGOs as well as the assets and opportunities found within the Somali Bantu community?* However, these questions are based on an understanding of who the Somali Bantu refugees in Nairobi are and what their community looks like. The underlying assumptions are that there are refugees in Nairobi identifying as Somali Bantus and that they form a community. These assumptions were based on initial contacts with Somali Bantus in Nairobi, but a lack of existing data meant that they had to be confirmed during the course of the study.

Identifying as Somali Bantu

Based on the literature, I knew that 'Somali Bantu' was a term given to a certain group of people in the refugee camps during the 1990s, and that these people subsequently constructed an ethnic identity around this term. The people first called Somali Bantu were from the lower Juba river, had retained memories of ancestral identities in East Africa, and were experiencing racial discrimination based on certain physical features, primarily the texture of their hair and the shape of their faces and noses. Within Somalia, they had been called a number of derogatory names, including *addoon* ('slave'), *jareer* ('hard-hair'), and 'African'. However, these racialized categories were also applied to groups of people who did not come from the Juba river and did not have any memories of Bantu ancestry. The category of *jareer*

covered a significant percentage of the population of southern Somalia, including distinct groups along the Shabelle river and lineages of Somali clans. In the refugee camps and the US diaspora, most people who fell into the *jareer* category were called Somali Bantu, but I did not know to what extent people in Nairobi used the term or perceived themselves to be part of a common ethnic group.

By limiting the study population to 'Somali Bantu', I had already introduced a certain bias to the question. However, when my initial contacts organized the community townhall meeting, I was surprised at the diversity of attendees. Some were the 'stereotypical' Somali Bantus from the Juba river, but many were from Mogadishu or other cities in southern Somalia. At one point during the meeting, a young Somali man entered the room, trying to find out what was going on and whether he could join. He was quickly ushered out again and told that this was a meeting for 'Somali Bantu' only.

The 20 interview participants all identified as Somali Bantu in order to participate in the study, but when asked about their origins in Somalia, they were able to name a variety of sub-groups. Several participants claimed membership in one of the distinct indigenous farming communities along the Shabelle river, the *Shiidle*, *Makanne*, and *Shabelle*. Their mother tongue was standard Somali (*Maxaa Tiri*), and many had grown up in the cities of Mogadishu or Beletweyne. Other interview participants claimed membership in a Somali clan, specifically the *Geledi*, the *Bimaal* and the *Ajuraan*. Some of them spoke standard Somali as their mother tongue, while others spoke a closely related Somali language called *Maay*. Finally, several participants came from the Juba river and identified either simply as Somali Bantu, or as a member of their ancestral group, *Mayao* and *Mushunguli*. The *Mushunguli* still speak their

ancestral Bantu language *Kizigula* but usually speak *Maay* as a local trade language, while the Mayao and other Juba river groups speak a dialect of *Maay* as their mother tongue.

Interview participants confirmed that both *jareer* and Somali Bantu are racialized terms and that they are generally interchangeable. As one man explained:

> In Somalia they judge you by your physical features and we are recognized as Jareerweyne [*jareer nation*] or Somali Bantu.

One man from the Shabelle river acknowledged that some people reject the term 'Somali Bantu', "but," he added "I don't care." When asked about the different subgroups, especially about those from Shabelle vs those from Juba, participants generally emphasized the unity of all Somali Bantu:

> We are all the same since we all share the name of Somali Bantu … Everyone who is Somali Bantu can marry each other.

This was in marked contrast to the distinction participants made between Somali Bantus and ethnic Somalis (sometimes called *Somali Somali* as a way of distinguishing the groups). Even those participants who were members of a Somali clan were emphatic about the difference between the two groups. Many complained about discrimination from ethnic Somalis and unequal opportunities. One woman summed up:

> As Somali Bantu and Somali Somali we are not the same. We are not treated equally.

These findings confirmed the published information; Somali Bantu refugees view themselves as a distinct ethnic group separate from other Somalis. Despite the variety of subgroups, geographic origin, and linguistic diversity, the experience of racialized discrimination and marginalization has resulted in a common identity. It is possible, of course, that the feeling of unity among members of different Somali Bantu groups stems primarily from the fact that

interview participants lived as refugees in Kenya rather than within their communities in southern Somalia.[1] The number of Somali Bantus in Nairobi is most likely to low for subgroups to form their own support networks, forcing the different groups to cooperate more.

Coming to Nairobi

When presenting my study to the community, I had not specified that I was only researching refugees. For one, I knew that all Somali Bantu in Nairobi were either first or second generation immigrants from Somalia, and that the overall insecurity and instability in Somalia had led the Kenyan government and the UNHCR to grant *prima facie* refugee status to asylum seekers from Somalia. That meant that an asylum seeker from Somalia did not have to prove persecution on an individual level in order to be accepted as a refugee in Kenya.

But I also knew that many migrants from Somalia had never experienced a functioning government and thus had little understanding of the importance of legal categories such as 'citizen', 'immigrant', or 'refugee.' Thus, interview participants might refer to themselves (and be referred to by others) as refugees regardless of their legal status in the country, and decisions to change one's status seldom follow the rationale of those who created these categories. As a result, I interviewed a number of people who were not legally 'refugees.'

Participants shared a number of different reasons for leaving Somalia. Some experienced general insecurity and threats of violence, as this man recounted:

> I did not have any security. When I woke up in the morning and went to work, I met a lot of risks, like bombs exploding. Maybe you want to pass a safe road, then you find the

[1] This common identity was not only expressed by interview participants but also observed in social interactions before and during data collection. I discovered a number of friendships between members of different subgroups, including people who claimed to dislike interacting with ethnic Somalis.

> police there, telling you: You can't pass here. So you choose a different road and might meet robbers there.

Others told stories of individual persecution or violence:

> My husband was killed by al-Shabaab when I was three months pregnant. I gave birth there, then I came to Nairobi. I came by bus, the journey took almost one and a half months. I escaped in fear and came to Nairobi looking for safety.

Not all participants left Somalia because of insecurity. Some came to Nairobi looking for better education or work opportunities.

> My husband didn't have a job in Somalia, so he decided to come here. I came with him.

Accompanying or following family members was given by a number of people as the main reason they left Somalia. One woman explained:

> At some point, my husband left and I didn't know where he was. After some months I heard he was in Nairobi, so I came together with another family to look for him.

A number of participants came to Kenya as children with family members and grew up in the refugee camps. One young man was even born in the camps as a second-generation refugee. Several young women working in the household of another family in Somalia and traveled along when their employers moved. In some cases it was hard to distinguish between a familial and a working relationship:

> My parents died and I was staying with neighbors. When they moved here, I came along … The family I came with left. After that, I was living with another family… I was young, about 12 years old. I knew nothing about the world. That family mistreated me, but I had what I needed.

Just as the reasons for leaving Somalia varied, so did the routes the refugees took to get to Nairobi. Overall, Somali Bantus from the Juba river tended to arrive in Kenya, register as refugees, and live in one of the refugee camps for some time. One young woman who grew up in Kakuma even preferred life in the camp to that in Nairobi because of her fear of the police,

but generally, participants described Kakuma and Dadaab camps as very harsh and difficult places.

> There is scorching sun, shortage of water, shortage of food, lack of security. There was a time when the host community came, even during daytime, and raped the girls. That's why most people hate to live in the refugee camp.

Lack of security and specifically sexual violence was mentioned by several people. Lack of food was also a concern expressed by a number of people and listed as one of the main reasons for moving to Nairobi.

> The ration card they give us is not enough for the family. That's why I came here in order to feed them.

Interviews with service providers confirmed that food rations in the refugee camps had been cut in the last five years due to funding shortages, and the variety of food had been reduced as well. Especially families with many children complained that the food they received in the camp would not last for the whole month. Other than the food refugees receive for free through their ration cards, food in Kakuma refugee camp is significantly more expensive than in urban centers in Kenya. Many refugees are forced to find additional sources of income to supplement their rations. Finding work in Nairobi is the primary reason refugees leave the camps.

> I was born in Dadaab and I grew up there. I went to school there. The main problem I see is a lack of jobs. When I experienced that there is no job, I decided to come to Nairobi, both for myself and for my family … The little amount of money I get I send to my family.

Some people specifically came to Nairobi because they needed the income to support family members who remained in the camps. Others came, like the young man in the previous quote, because they had finished school and were becoming adults. Social expectations on

them included getting married and starting their own household, as well as supporting aging parents or younger siblings. Being idle as a young man can feel like failure.

> There, if you graduate from school, you can't find work … All my friends who graduated with me are just sitting at home. We're eating the food but we don't work. There is no perspective. I ran away from those things. That's why I came here.
>
> There, my father sees me every day, not working. Every day he'll ask: What did you get? But you're just sitting at home. You have to change that behavior. Whether you're working or not, your father expects you to contribute. But he sees you sitting there, not going anywhere. So, I had to change that. I had to look for a job.

With Somali Bantus arriving in Kenya ever since the early 1990s, there is now a whole generation who has grown up in the camps. Increasingly, young men and women choose to leave the camp to find jobs. One woman I talked to claimed she was the first to come to Nairobi from Kakuma, but since then word has spread and more are coming every year.

The movement from the camps to Nairobi is not a one-way trip, however. Shortly after I had finished data collection, word spread within the community that the UNHCR was conducting a 'verification exercise' in Kakuma. Any refugee who was not present would be listed as inactive, meaning their ration cards would be invalid and their resettlement cases would be paused. To prevent that from happening, all the research participants who were still registered in Kakuma left Nairobi on a perilous two-day bus ride to be back with their families when the camp authorities would come to their house to verify everybody's identity. The exercise took weeks to complete; afterwards, the refugees slowly made their way back to Nairobi.

In addition, there are some Somali Bantus who fail in Nairobi. Either they are unable to make enough money to cover the higher living expenses in the city or they are deterred by the level of police harassment they experience in the city. They either find a way to return to the

camp themselves, or they might be deported there by the police.

Many refugees from urban centers in Somalia avoided the refugee camps altogether. While many of the Somali Bantu from agricultural villages along the Juba river had almost no previous experience of government services or modern amenities found it easier to adjust to the simple life in the refugee camp, those from cities such as Mogadishu or Merka were used to a very different lifestyle and had little interest in being a 'refugee'. These research participants had set out from Somalia planning to move to an urban center in Kenya in order to find safety, education, and work. Some managed to avoid the refugee regime altogether and travelled directly to Nairobi, others spent a few days or months in Dadaab.

> My plan had been to come directly to Nairobi, but there is no way to avoid Dadaab, so I stayed there for 2 months.

Several participants had lived in other Kenyan cities before coming to Nairobi, and some had even been registered as refugees in neighboring countries like Ethiopia or Uganda. One woman explained that she had an ongoing resettlement case in another country, but life there had become too difficult so she decided to move to Nairobi. Another woman announced that she was preparing for a short trip back to Mogadishu to settle a family dispute there. Afterwards, she intended to return to Nairobi. Overall, Somali Bantus who avoided the camps seemed more mobile and had more complex migration routes.[2]

Intersecting Vulnerabilities

As I visited the homes of different research participants, I noticed a variety of

[2] For some, this increased mobility seemed to stem from personal resources (including intangible resources such as business experience or education). Others traveled as dependents of family members or employers and had little control over their migration routes.

socioeconomic situations. Some Somali Bantu shared a small room, even a single mattress, with several other people, while others had managed to rent several rooms and even featured a TV or a sofa in their living room. Overall, all the interview participants were experiencing some level of poverty, and many were clearly struggling to meet basic needs. However, I had previously experienced similar levels of poverty among other refugees in Nairobi and even among many Kenyans.

Somali Bantus also faced a number of structural barriers to participating in Kenyan society. Refugee laws made it impossible for many to live in Nairobi legally or to find formal employment. In addition, a lack of cultural capital meant that Somali Bantus were confined to a small niche within the Kenyan economy. Yet these were challenges faced by other refugees as well. As I talked with Kenyan service providers about the situation of the Somali Bantu, one (usually unspoken) questions was often: Why should this particular group of people deserve our special attention?

Both among Kenyan nationals and among Somali refugees, there is much more variation in socioeconomic status than among Somali Bantu refugees. Among Kenyans, of course, there is the whole range from abject poverty to incredible wealth. Wealth and power are not shared equally among different ethnic groups in Kenya, and there are some communities that are very much marginalized and impoverished as a whole, but overall many Kenyans have within their extended social networks access to some degree of wealth and power. The same is true, to a lesser extent, for Somali refugees. While, as refugees, they face barriers or documentation and stigma, many Somali refugees benefit from social networks to Kenyan Somalis, to the global Somali diaspora, or to the elites in Somalia. While there are Somali refugees who are just as

poor as most Somali Bantus, there are also many who have established themselves in Nairobi as successful businesspeople. Furthermore, in Kenya most structural barriers can be overcome with the help of financial resources, and wealthy Somali refugees can live quite comfortably in Nairobi, accessing services and resources and not worrying about police harassment or deportation.

Somali Bantus don't have that same degree of variation within their community, and thus they don't have the community resources to support each other in the way Somalis do. One Somali Bantu woman described the difference in the following way:

> Somalis have money and houses. They assist one another. If they see their brothers are suffering, they will assist them. They will create jobs for them. But the Somali Bantu people have nothing at all, so how can they assist each other? If your brother sees you suffering, he can't do anything for you other than praying for God to help you! That's the difference. Those people, they have been here for a long time and they have buildings, and they help one another.

This perspective was echoed by a number of other participants. One young man added that because there are ethnic Somalis in government positions both in Somalia and in Kenya, ethnic Somalis benefit from government policies and from clan connections and thus have access to better education, better jobs, and better legal documentation.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, clan connections are a very important resource among ethnic Somalis. Based on customary law (*xeer*), clan members have contractual obligations towards each other that include many different forms of support. Among refugees in Nairobi, clan connections are used to find jobs and housing, to pay medical bills and police fines, and to find sponsors for education, migration, and business ventures. Since clans number many thousands of people bound together by common descent, ethnic Somalis wield significant

amounts of social capital and are likely to find an existing support system in many places across the world.

While Somali Bantus support each other as well, they don't have the same clearly defined contractual obligations toward each other, and they don't have the extended clan networks to draw on. This difference was mentioned by several research participants as an important factor in success.

> The Somali Bantu refugees in Nairobi are poor, and they don't have much support. Other Somalis have their brothers who help each other, while Somali Bantus don't assist each other. For Somalis, they like to assist each other. Those who go abroad – if one of them goes out of the country, they assist each other. Not just the same family, but as long as they are the same clan, they assist each other. But Somali Bantus don't assist each other. That's the biggest problem.

Avoiding the Authorities

One of the NGO interviews participants was a protection officer who could explain the legal situation of refugees in Nairobi in detail. According to him, the biggest problem that refugees in the city face is a lack of ID documents. Not having the right documentation prevents refugees from accessing the formal job market, as well as a number of financial and other services. More importantly, though, a lack of proper documentation creates vulnerability that is exploited by the Kenyan police.

This perception was confirmed by my Somali Bantu interview participants. Lack of ID documents was identified as one of the biggest problems by 50% of the participants, and police harassment by 45%.

Police Harassment

Many Kenyans imagine Eastleigh as a haven for Somali terrorists and pirates, and a

number of Western countries have issued travel warnings specifically for this neighborhood. Yet none of the Somali Bantu refugees I spoke with mentioned terrorists as a problem, and only one mentioned robbers in Eastleigh. Instead, the biggest threat to most interview participants was clearly the police. As one man put it: “Here in Eastleigh, we don’t really have robbers, other than the police.”

Some refugees understand that the Kenyan police have legitimate reasons to arrest them, as they don’t have legal authorization to be in Nairobi. One young woman from Kakuma explained:

> Your documents show you’re a refugee. You’re here without authority. You’re a criminal, you’ll be arrested.

But as there are compelling reasons for these people to be in Nairobi regardless, their only hope is to “convince them to understand your situation and release you.” One woman recounted how she was able to obtain the proper documents and since then has not had any problems with the police, although she is still afraid of them.

Other refugees, however, describe police arrests as arbitrary and unjustified. Several interview participants claimed that they had been arrested despite having proper documentation. In one case, a police officer even destroyed a document presented by a refugee. The only identification that really provides protection from the police is the Kenyan national ID. This perception was confirmed by the protection officer I spoke with. According to him, many police officers are confused by the various identification documents carried by refugees, some of which are little more than a piece of paper. Others, however, don’t care about the legal status of refugees at all, they simply want to extort money. Refugees regularly

described interactions with police as “they ask you for money,” or “they will take all your money.”

Arrests by the police are a very common occurrence. Some estimate that they are arrested about once a month, others about every other week. One man summarized: “If you’re not arrested today or tomorrow, you’ll be arrested the next day.” The only way to avoid arrests is to avoid the police completely. But Eastleigh has a significant police presence during the day, and even more so at night. Going out for lunch, for prayers at the mosque, or even just to buy something at the grocery store always carries the risk of being ‘caught’ by the police. Many refugees avoid going outside as much as possible, especially at night. One man lamented “We can’t see our friends at night because we’re afraid of the police.”

Even though refugees are often ‘arrested', they are rarely taken to the police station, and nobody I talked with had ever been charged in court. In most cases, those who are stopped by the police just pay the required bribe immediately, or negotiate their release on the way to the station. One man described the process:

> If they catch you, they say: ‘Give us money.’ If they take you to their car, the demands increase. Now it’s double the money. If you go all the way to the station, it again doubles. You better pay something when they first arrest you, instead of waiting until you’re at the station.

Only two men described actually being taken to Pangani police station because they didn’t have any money on them. One met some friends at the station who were able to pay something on his behalf to get him released. The other was detained for two days. “If you don’t have any money, you’re stuck,” he explained. The one time I had the opportunity to personally observe the jail at Pangani police station, I encountered about 50 refugees there who were all waiting to be ransomed by relatives.

Should a refugee be taken to court, there are two possible charges. If they are not registered as a refugee or an asylum seeker in Kenya, they will be charged with being in the country illegally. In theory, a conviction would result in deportation. In practice, however, refugees are able to claim asylum in court and will usually be released to the Refugee Affairs Secretariat. If, on the other hand, they are registered in one of the refugee camps, they will be charged with 'residing outside designated areas.' But in practice this is not seen as a serious offense and will usually just result in being sent back to the camp. Instead of going through the trouble of a trial, the government often just detains people and transports them back to the camp directly.

RAS and UNHCR

The process of becoming a recognized refugee in Kenya is a long and complicated one. When a person arrives in Kenya, they are supposed to present themselves to the authorities and claim asylum. In Nairobi, this is done at the Refugee Affairs Secretariat in Shauri Moyo, not far from Eastleigh. At that point they are registered as an asylum seeker, and they will be given two documents. One is the government Proof of Registration, which is also called the Manifest. The other one is an asylum seeker's pass, valid for 6 months, which will include a date for an interview appointment. Once a person is registered as an asylum seeker, they enter into the refugee status determination process, which by law should take about 3 months and concludes with an interview. After the interview, the asylum seeker is given another appointment to collect the decision. The case then goes to the refugee eligibility panel, and from there to the commissioner to sign the documents. After that, the asylum seeker can collect their decision. If they are approved as a refugee, they are given a recognition letter and told to apply for a

refugee ID. Once they have applied, they are given a waiting slip, which they use to collect the ID. Ideally, any refugee would be in possession of a recognition letter and a refugee ID card.

The entire process is handled by the Refugee Affairs Secretariat (RAS), a branch of the Kenyan government. However, RAS was only formed in 2016, before that, the UNHCR was responsible for refugee status determination, and instead of a Recognition Letter from the Kenyan government, refugees received a document from the UNHCR called a Mandate. As a result, some refugees still have a Mandate, while others have the Recognition Letter. In addition, the transition period from UNHCR to RAS was not a smooth one, and for about two years both refugees and NGOs were often confused as to the proper process of registration and status determination. In March 2018, RAS stopped registering refugees in order to live in Nairobi. Even before that time, many refugees who registered in Nairobi were transferred to the Kakuma or Dadaab refugee camps as refugees were discouraged from living in Nairobi. Since March 2018, however, all asylum seekers are registered to reside in the camps, regardless of their situation. Their Proof of Registration document lists their place of residence as either Dadaab or Kakuma, and they are issued a Movement Pass to travel to that location within 10 days of their registration. Those who are unable or unwilling to live in the refugee camps can appeal to an exemption panel at the RAS, but that panel has a huge backlog of cases to consider, with over 6,000 pending cases. Until an asylum seeker is given an exemption to live in Nairobi, they live in Nairobi without authorization and their status determination process in the camps cannot be completed.

In practice, the process of becoming a refugee in Kenya and receiving all the necessary documentation is not as straightforward as described above. Instead of being completed in the

envisioned three months, the refugee status determination takes about two years. As the asylum seeker's pass is only valid for six months, asylum seekers have to return to RAS every six months to get it renewed.

Additionally, even the initial registration can be quite difficult. A Somali refugee I interviewed separately from this project told me that when he first arrived at RAS in Shauri Moyo to claim asylum, the computer systems were down and he was given a piece of paper with an appointment to return another day. By the time I talked to him, he had gone to 11 different appointments and was still not registered as an asylum seeker!

Finally, even after a refugee has been given a Recognition Letter and has applied for their refugee card, it can take a long time to be processed. The refugee card is only valid for a few years, after that it has to be renewed.

As a result of all this, some refugees living in Nairobi have not been registered at all and are in the country undocumented. Others have asylum seeker's passes that indicate their residence in one of the camps, and so they are living in Nairobi without authorization. Some refugees have asylum seeker's passes that are expired and were not renewed, others have expired refugee cards, or just a waiting slip indicating that they have applied for a card. Additionally, many refugees are not used to written documents and live in very unstable environments, resulting in documents getting dirty, torn, lost, or stolen.

Of the Somali Bantu refugees I interviewed, several were not registered in Kenya. One of them had entered the country in a tourist visa which was long expired. Another one had previously lived in Uganda and was registered as a refugee there. A third one had tried to register at Shauri Moyo but was denied entrance. About half of my interview participants were

registered as refugees in Kakuma or Dadaab, and held different forms of documentation from there. One man who had been in Kakuma for over 10 years still had not received his refugee card, and the waiting slip had been torn up by a police officer during one of many arrests. Another had his documents stolen from his room several months before the interview. Only three people told me they were registered to live in Nairobi, and just one of them was in possession of a refugee card for Nairobi, which afforded her the highest degree of protection possible for a refugee.

The worst consequence of not having the proper documentation is increased vulnerability in the face of police harassment. But a lack of documentation has far-reaching effect in many areas of life. It makes it much harder for refugees to acquire a SIM card for their phones or to open an mPesa[3] account. In some cases, it prevents access to services such as education or healthcare. Perhaps most importantly, a lack of documentation make formal employment impossible.

To find work in the formal job market in Kenya, an employee needs to provide their employer with their KRA pin number for income tax. However, the Kenya Revenue Authority only issues pin numbers to foreigners who hold a valid work permit. In theory, a refugee can apply for a work permit, a process that takes about six months. In practice, it is almost impossible for refugees to receive work permits in Kenya, and most applications end in a 'no merit' decision. The main reason for this is that Kenya has fairly high requirements for foreigners applying for a work permit. The applicant has to demonstrate that they have

[3] mPesa is a very popular mobile money transfer system operated by Kenya's largest phone network provider, Safaricom. In addition to being the vehicle for domestic remittances between city and camp, mPesa is also the primary means of paying government fees and fines.

'exceptional skills' which their employer was unable to find locally, and that they will pass on those skills to a Kenyan employee. The vast majority of refugees are poorly educated and can't offer any 'exceptional skills'. Those who grew up in the refugee camps have received a Kenyan education and thus have no possibility of acquiring skills not available to other Kenyans.

In some cases, refugees are hired as translators as they might be able to speak a language not found in Kenya. In the past, these refugees were most likely to successfully apply for a work permit. In recent years, however, even those applications have been denied, pointing to an unwillingness within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to grant refugees work permits.

Finding Work and Keeping Jobs

While refugees in the camps receive free food, shelter, education, and healthcare, these services are not available within Nairobi. The rationale behind this is that only refugees who can support themselves should live in urban areas of Kenya. In some cases, where refugees can demonstrate that they are not safe in the camps or that they have to live in Nairobi in order to access better healthcare, the UNHCR will facilitate a move to Nairobi and provide initial cash support, intended to enable refugees to set up a household and pay the first three months of rent. After that, urban refugees are expected to earn their own income, although there are some NGOs in Nairobi who offer support to vulnerable refugees.

As a result, one of the biggest needs of refugees in Nairobi is to find a source of income that will at least cover the cost of food and housing. A small number of urban refugees receive remittances from family members in the diaspora. In some cases, these remittances are

sufficient to cover all their expenses and even enable them to pursue further education. In most cases, however, remittances only supplement other sources of income.

Among the Somali Bantus I interviewed, very few had family members in the US, and even those who did complained that they did not receive any support from them. In fact, in many cases Somali Bantus decided to move to Nairobi because they did not receive any remittances. One of the main motivations to live in the city is to find work that will provide a sufficient income. Consequently, of the 20 Interview participants, over 80% were very concerned about finding work, and about 50% listed a lack of jobs as one of the biggest problems in Nairobi. Many Somali Bantus were also very concerned with keeping work, and 25% mentioned work conditions as a major problem, as well.

Since none of the Somali Bantus I've encountered in Nairobi possessed the documents necessary for formal employment, and very few have a level of education comparable to their Kenyan peers, their options for work were very limited. Most of my interview participants did not speak English or Swahili, the two national languages of Kenya, and one person told me she had never been to school at all. As a result, several interview participants did not have any work, and several others worked as casual laborers, looking for new opportunities every day. Young Somali Bantu women most often sought employment as domestic workers, while more experienced women were often 'hawkers', running a small business of selling clothes or food on the streets or in shopping centers. Somali Bantu men have found a wide variety of low-skill jobs, although the majority work as tailors.

Female Domestic Workers

Living and working in the household of a Somali family seems to be a common situation

for young Somali Bantu women inside Somalia. I've been told several stories were girls as young as 12 were in full-time employment as domestic workers. One of my initial contacts in the community told me about a relative who was working for a Somali family at age 12 when that family moved to the other side of Somalia and took the girl with her. Her mother lost all contact to the girl for about 20 years, by which time she had several children of her own. Two of my interview participants told similar stories. One was taken to Kenya at age 12 while in the employment of a Somali family, another was about the same age when she was taken to Ethiopia. Although none of the Somali Bantus I know have called these situations slavery, it is clear that the employers have almost total control over the lives of these girls.

Somali Bantu women who work for Somali families usually live with their employers. They are given a place to sleep, and they eat from the food they prepare for the family. While it is not clear whether teenaged girls are also given a salary, the adult women I talked with are all being paid for their work. Salaries seem to range around 6,000 to 10,000 KES per month, in addition to food and accommodation. I've met two Somali Bantu women who were able to find domestic work only during daytime hours because they had small children to care for and were not able to live with their employers. But generally, I was told:

> When you are working for Somalis, they don't allow you to stay at another place. You have to stay with them.

Domestic workers who live with their employers usually start work very early in the morning to prepare breakfast. Throughout the day they will cook food, wash dishes, care for the children, wash clothes, run errands, etc. As one interview participant described it: "You do everything in the house, so your work never ends."

Although domestic work is common, everybody in the community seems to agree that

work conditions are very bad and it's generally the worst kind of work. Interview participants described their employers as being very controlling and demanding, overworking their employees, and abusing them both verbally and physically. One person also mentioned sexual abuse.

Domestic workers are struggling to maintain a social life, as their employers will give them very little free time and limit their phone use at work. Some girls call their friends at night after everybody else has gone to sleep. Others will lie to their employers that they are being summoned by family members, just to get out of the house and spend some time with friends.

One Somali Bantu woman described how her employer forced her to remain in her job by threatening to call the police and have her arrested, should she decide to leave. But generally, employers seem more likely to fire domestic workers as soon as there is a conflict. Especially adult women who are more likely to stand up for themselves are often fired after just a few months or even a few days. Sometimes they are thrown out of the house in the middle of the night, at other times, they are not paid for the time they worked. Many domestic workers hold deep resentment against former employers, but also acknowledge that they don't have any other options but to continue in this line of work.

There seems to be a significant difference between women who came straight from Somalia and those who lived in the refugee camps. The former often moved with their employers at a young age and worked for the same family for many years. In their 20s, they will often try to leave this work, either by marrying and being supported by their husbands, or by finding other work as shop keepers or hawkers. The women who grew up in the refugee camps generally don't start working until they reach adulthood and feel the need to support older

parents or younger siblings still living in the camp. They tend to send any money they earn to their family and not save anything for themselves. But they also tend to get fired more often, and have a harder time keeping a job. When out of work, they might travel back to the refugee camp or stay with friends in Nairobi.

Male Employees

While domestic workers are technically employees, their situation often resembles servitude or even slavery, as employers exercise enormous control over their lives. This is quite different for Somali Bantu men seeking work in Nairobi. While male employees also complain about difficult work conditions, they almost never live at their place of work, and as a result have significantly more freedom, but also a different set of challenges.

Somali Bantu men seeking employment in Nairobi have more options available to them than women. I've met Somali Bantus working as janitors, shop keepers, waiters, cooks, or Quran teachers. Others are day laborers, looking for casual work such as loading trucks or helping out in a shop. The most popular option, however, seems to be work as a tailor.

Those who are being directly employed by Somalis often complain of "discrimination". This is usually described in two different ways: Verbal abuse based on their status as Somali Bantus, and denial of job opportunities because they are not part of the Somali clan system. While I have been given very few examples of verbal abuse, presumably because of the shame connected to those memories, interview participants talk openly about the second kind of discrimination. It is based on the social obligations of support within the Somali clan system. If, for example, a Somali business owner is asked for a job opportunity by a member of their sub-clan, they are obligated to give preference to that person, regardless of their qualifications.

As a result, Somali Bantus tell of many instances where they were fired from a job because another Somali wanted it. In some cases, the person replacing them was clearly less qualified. One interview participant, a cook, even complained that he was often hired to train an unqualified relative of his employer, and once that person had learned enough from him for the job, he would be fired again. Because of this form of discrimination, most Somali Bantu employees are struggling to keep jobs. They might only be employed for a few weeks or a few months before they are replaced by somebody else. The only Somali Bantu men I've met who were in the same job for several years were all from Mogadishu. They were slightly more educated and had more cultural competency and language skills, and were thus more integrated into Somali society.

Because of these patterns of discrimination, many Somali Bantu men prefer to work as tailors. Instead of being directly employed, tailors seem to work more like contractors who are being paid commission for their work. Tailoring usually takes place in a small workshop adjacent to fabrics stores in a shopping mall. Sometimes, the owner of a fabrics store sets up a sewing machine in a free corner of their shop. Either way, the workspace and the sewing machines are usually owned by a Somali businessperson. Customers buy fabrics in the store, then order them to be made into dresses by the tailors. Often these are extremely simple jobs that only cost 20 shillings. The tailor get to keep half of the money, while the owner of the sewing machine and the workshop takes the other half. While this arrangement is financially less desirable than direct employment, many tailors prefer it because of the flexibility in working hours and especially because there is less 'discrimination'. Many tailors complain, though, that there is a lack of work, and few seem to have a secure job at a specific work shop. Many tailors work as

casual laborers, walking around the malls and visiting their friends in the hope of getting to assist somebody in their work.

Overall, many Somali Bantu men struggle with a very insecure work environment where they their income varies from day to day, and much time is spent on finding work. In a good month, the average employee might make as much as 8,000-12,000 shillings, which is barely enough to pay the bills in a place like Eastleigh.

During my interviews I asked participants about the possibility of working for Kenyans. This was always dismissed as impossible, although the reasons given varied. One man explained that Kenyan employers demand proper documentation and will not accept refugees. A woman exclaimed that Kenyan don't have any jobs to offer since they are poor and looking for work themselves. Others simply said that their lack of language skills made it impossible for them to interact much with Kenyans and so they were forced to work for Somalis.

Business Owners

Four of the interview participants ran their own businesses, rather than working for somebody else. Surprisingly, all four are women. In Kenya, all four would be classified as hawkers as they do not operate in a shop or an office, but sell their products on the street or go from shop to shop in the malls. As hawkers, they are unable to obtain business licenses (which are generally available for refugees), and are thus vulnerable to harassment from both the police and the Nairobi county council. In three cases, the women make and sell street food or beverages, which utilizes their domestic skills and requires minimal start-up capital. One made tea at home, then took it in thermos flasks to the malls to sell tea by the cup to shopkeepers. Another one made pastries at home, then also sold them to shopkeepers in the mall. A third

woman had set up a little stall on the side of the road close to her home where she could cook and sell a variety of street food. One time I passed by her shop to find a Kenyan woman from the nearby slum helping her peel potatoes, seemingly as a casual employee. All three women had school-aged children to support, and two lived without a spouse, making them the only breadwinner of the family. The fourth woman had a business of buying clothes wholesale and then selling them on the side of road. All four women had grown up in urban settings in Somalia and migrated to Kenya as adults, which seemed to give them the social and financial skills to operate their own business.

These businesswomen spent their days in public spaces on the streets and in the malls, in marked contrast to the number of interview participants who told me that they tried to move around the neighborhood as little as possible to avoid being arrested by the police. As a result, the women were exposing themselves to the risks of confrontations with authorities on a daily basis, which could easily mean incurring significant financial losses:

> They have arrested me many times! About every other week. And if you manage to avoid the police, the city council will get you. They will take everything you have. They don't ask for money. If you have sambusa[4] or whatever you're selling, they will take it away from you. They police will ask you for money and if you give it to them, they will release you. But the city council will take everything. They don't care.

The Nairobi city council – or more accurately, the Nairobi county council that replaced the city council after the implementation of the 2010 constitution – is responsible for issuing business permits and enforcing compliance. For those women running a food business, there was the additional requirement of having a health certificate. Lack of either document meant the loss of

[4] Sambusa is an alternative regional name for samosa, a savory pastry with Indian origins but very popular in East Africa.

the business, which could only be recovered by paying a bribe.

Several of the interview participants mentioned having their own business as a dream for the future. One young woman who had a job as a domestic worker explained that with the right amount of starting capital, she would be able to rent a shop and start selling clothes. Several young men who worked as tailors talked about starting their own tailoring workshop. One man gave me a detailed list of all the things he would need to start a workshop, including the prices for each. Obviously, he had already put some thought into this dream:

> Since I am now a tailor, I would be very glad to get some support to get my own place and my own machine … [the machine is] 27,000. And then there is the overlock. It's very expensive: 45,000. You need both of them. But the overlock you can sometimes borrow from your neighbors … The room is 15,000. Electricity might be 1,000 per month … If you own the machine and the room, you might make 2,000 in a day. 1,000 is for the machine and room, 1,000 you take home.

Several months after I conducted the interviews, one of these young men managed to get a substantial cash investment from relatives in the USA and actually turned this dream into a reality. He rented a very small workshop and bought two sewing machines. He even managed to get a business permit for his workshop from the city council.

Basic Needs: Food and Shelter

Having a place to sleep and food to eat are the two most basic necessities. Compared to most other places in Kenya, both are fairly expensive in Nairobi, and for many Somali Bantus, finding food and shelter is a constant struggle. However, the struggles for food and shelter are quite different: Shelter is secured on a monthly basis by renting a room or an apartment. The challenge is to save up enough money throughout the month to be able to make a fairly large

one-time payment for the new month. Food, on the other hand, is a daily expense, especially for those without access to a kitchen.

Many Somali Bantus acknowledge that those who can't afford to pay for food or housing are the neediest within the community, and stabilizing them is the highest priority. These people fall into three categories: (1) those who can't find a steady source of income and try to make ends meet every day by looking for casual work, (2) those who have been fired from their job and don't have any income while they look for new work, (3) those who have families and their income is not sufficient to cover all their needs.

Overall, 60% of the participants mentioned food as a problem. Some described worrying about whether they would have enough food for their family, others admitted not having enough to eat and being hungry. One young man told me:

> I don't know if I'll get money today and if I'll eat or not. Yesterday, I only ate one meal. Today, I ate breakfast, but I don't know whether I'll get lunch.

When people get desperate for food, they have to resort to begging from their friends or neighbors. But one man explained how shameful it is to have to beg:

> You might have someone coming to you saying: I have not been able to eat lunch today, can you help me? Imagine, you're a grown man and you're begging from someone your own age! How does that make you feel in your heart? And me, I don't have anything to give that person that will satisfy him. So I give him the little I have to help him. There are a lot of people who are suffering.

Since most Somali Bantus live in a single room which they either share with other single adults or with their immediate family, very few have access to a proper kitchen. In fact, single men often don't have any means to prepare their own food, relying instead on buying snacks and street food. Women with children usually cook their own food, often with a single propane burner placed in a corner of their room or in the hallway outside. Water for cooking and

washing dishes needs to be brought in from shared bathrooms, and food is prepared on a plate or into a pot on the floor. As nobody can afford a refrigerator, food that can't be stored for some time at room temperature has to be bought in small quantities on an almost daily basis. However, this way of cooking is not very different from what people are used to in the refugee camps or in the rural villages in Somalia.

Domestic workers usually don't have to worry about housing and food as they live with their employers and eat off of the food they prepare for them. Depending on the relationship with their employer, this can be challenging, as well. A young woman recounted: "They gave me food, but if I ate just a little bit they would complain: You're eating too much!"

Shelter is an even bigger struggle than food, with 75% of participants listing rent payments as one of the major problems of living in Nairobi. Rent prices in Eastleigh vary a lot based on location and the quality of the house. New apartment buildings in central Eastleigh will charge as much as 60,000[5] or 80,000 per month for a 3-bedroom apartment, while older, run-down buildings on the edges of the neighborhood ask for around 10,000 for a studio or 1-bedroom apartment, and around 5,000 for a single small room with shared bathroom facilities. Considering that many refugees in Eastleigh earn only around 10,000 from a steady job, paying rent is a struggle shared by almost all Somali Bantus. Those who don't have a steady income will try to share a room:

> There are some who are living five people in one room, each paying 1,000. And even that 1,000, some people can't find.

[5] All monetary amounts are given in Kenyan Shillings. The exchange rate in 2019 was approximately 100 KSH = 1 USD, so a rent of 60,000 would translate to around $600.

Saving up money to pay rent at the beginning of the month is a top priority to not end up homeless. Especially families often have to make very hard decisions between saving money for rent, paying school fees for their children, or paying medical bills. One mother explained:

> My daughter has been sick for almost one week, and I have not taken her to the hospital. The reason is that I just can't afford it. It's the end of the month and the rent is due. I'm not earning much from my business. So she has to stay here in the room and wait until I find enough money. But we're at the end of the month and I need to pay rent.

Those who were not able to save the money needed for the rent payment face eviction, unless they can negotiate a payment plan with their landlord.

> Even for this month the landlady tried to lock my room, but I convinced my neighbors to talk to her and they told her: Please allow me to pay my rent in small installments. Now I've paid half of it and I still owe her.

Threats of eviction seem to be a regular experience for many refugees. If the rent is overdue, the landlord will simply put a padlock on the door of the room until the rent is paid. Those who are unable to pay are evicted and have to look for a new place to sleep. A young man admitted:

> You know, even this month my room was been locked up by the landlord because I didn't manage to pay the rent … Sometimes I sleep in the mosque, and sometimes I sleep with my friends when the landlord has locked my own room because of the payment of the rent.

For single men or women, spending a few nights with friends doesn't seem to be a big problem, although several participants emphasized the insecurity of such an arrangement:

> I don't have my own place; I am staying with other people. Tomorrow they might tell me to leave. Then I'll have to find a new family to host me.

Families have far fewer options than singles when they are evicted. Although one of the participants told me that her whole family was staying with other people because they couldn't

afford a place of their own, there are few community members able to host a family. One man explained that paying rent was a bigger challenge for him now that he was married and had children, because he wouldn't be able to stay with friends if he was evicted: "It's harder for a family because they can't find a place to sleep."

Again, the situation is slightly different for domestic workers who live with their employers. While they don't have to worry about paying rent, losing their job means immediate homelessness.

> I used to work as a house helper for a family in a different part of town. They chased me out of their house at 3 in the morning!

Families and Family Networks

To understand the needs and resources available to each interview participant and the strategies they employed to make a living, it was crucial to gather information on their family situation, both in terms of immediate family and extended family. In some cases, family networks were a source of income and opportunities, in others they were a financial burden and a barrier to progress.

Camp Refugees

In terms of family situations, I found significant differences between refugees who had moved to Nairobi from the camps and those who had come directly from Somalia. Camp refugees shared similarities with rural-urban labor migrants in that only one or two members of a family came to the city to find work, while spouses with children and elderly parents stayed behind. One young woman's story was typical of these situations:

> I used to be married but I got divorced … My father is in Somalia, but my mother is in Kakuma. Since I don't have a husband I decided to come to Nairobi to work and give the little I get to my mom. It's very difficult but I have to be patient because of my mother. If I decide to marry again, that new husband might support me but not my mother. He might even not allow me to do anything for my family. That's why I decided not to marry but to support my mother. I can't give her everything she needs, but at least I can help some.

In another situation, a woman left her small child with the grandmother in the camp so she could work as a live-in house helper in Nairobi. A young man specifically came to support his siblings:

> [I came to Nairobi] to support my brothers and sisters. They are in Kakuma; they are studying there. I also went to school in Kakuma, but I've come here to hustle for them so they can continue their life and their studies there.

Because these young men and women only come to Nairobi to support relatives in the camp, they often operate on a very tight budget, trying to save as much of their income as possible to send 'home.' They endure greater hardships, such as the harsh life of a domestic worker or the cramped living conditions of shared rooms, and hardly spend anything on recreation or personal goals. Many communicate with family members in the camps on an almost daily basis and are constantly reminded of the needs and the familial obligations they are working to fulfill.

> My father calls me all the time. He is asking: Do you have something? What did you earn? But I don't have anything. I can't give anything to my brothers.

Although these camp refugees seem stuck in a fairly hopeless situation between the perpetual limbo of life in the camp and familial obligations forcing them to endure hardship in Nairobi, they generally seemed to have a positive outlook on life. For one, many had ongoing resettlement cases and held on to the ultimate dream of one day going to America. In addition, they had interacted with the refugee regime in the past and were aware of potential

opportunities coming from NGOs, even though none had specific hopes to personally receive aid in the immediate future. Most of all, though, these young men and women just showed the energy and hope of a new generation trying to build a life for themselves. Some expressed hopes of getting married and starting a family; others dreamed of starting their own business.

Connections to the diaspora seem to play a key role in realizing aspirations. While none of the interview participants admitted to getting support from relatives in the US[6], and quite a few complained about the way they had been abandoned by 'those in America', I observed a number of community member who at least occasionally received financial support from extended family in the USA, especially in the form of investments or collaborative business ventures. One young man summed up the support from the diaspora:

> There are some [in the USA] who help their families, but not other people, and even in those cases there is no guaranteed support. Its's only sometimes. But only for family members. You might get something one month and nothing the next month.

In some cases, Somali Bantus in the diaspora have family both in the refugee camp in Kenya and in Somalia, and have to decide who is most urgently in need of their support. Usually, remittances to Somalia have priority to those in Nairobi. However, some US-based Somali Bantus see Kenya as a place to invest. I was told of several cases where Somali Bantus in the US decided to buy real estate in coastal Kenya and had relatives in Nairobi oversee the construction of a house. In other cases, Somali Bantu men come to Kenya to look for a wife, sometimes without the intent of bringing them to the US. One participant explained:

[6] To a degree, this was undoubtedly due to response bias. The interviewer was seen as a foreigner with access to resources and emphasizing vulnerability and neediness during the interview was sometimes a strategic decision to improve chances or receiving aid. Observing living and working conditions, however, confirmed that many interview participants did not receive significant remittances.

> There are those who come from the USA, men who married Somali Bantu refugee women … But you know, those people marry them and then leave them here. They will come and stay with them for about three months during their holiday, then they will go back.

In one case, a Somali Bantu woman married a man from the USA who already had a wife there. As the second wife, there was no way for her to join her husband in America, but she was content to receive monthly remittances from him. Even $100 or $200 per month from a husband overseas can change the situation of a Somali Bantu woman in Nairobi dramatically. While these women might still decide to pursue work in order to support their families in the refugee camps, they don't have to worry about their basic needs like housing and food, and might free up more time to socialize.

Urban Migrants

Somali Bantus coming directly to Nairobi from urban centers in Somalia overall have very different family situations. Instead of coming as individuals with close connections to family back 'home', these migrants often travel as a family looking for a better life in Kenya. In a number of cases widows or divorced women come to Kenya with their children in search of safety and better education. In other cases, the husband will come to Nairobi looking for better job opportunities and bring his wife and children along.

Living in Nairobi with a family includes a different set of familial obligations. Rather than working hard and sending all the money to family members in the camp, those living with children in Nairobi have to cater to the daily needs of their family and find solutions to a wide range of problems, including education and healthcare. As mentioned above, providing food and shelter for a family in Nairobi is more demanding than surviving as an individual, and often

the head of the household has to make very difficult decisions on what to spend their savings on.

Widows with a number of children are in a particularly challenging situation. They have the additional expenses of caring for their children, but they also don't have the option of working as live-in house helpers. So they have to start their own business as hawkers, selling home-made food or beverages on the streets or in the malls. These women, out of necessity, are independent and willing to take risks, and when necessary ask neighbors for help. They are able to find the cheapest schools and hospitals to take their children to, often government facilities of very poor quality. While the mothers have little hope of improving their own situation, they invest in their children hoping to give them the option of a brighter future.

More common than widows with children are families where both parents live together, sometimes with a grandparent. These families avoid the refugee camps as much as possible, being used to life in an urban setting. Since they don't have relatives to support in camps, they are able to focus on improving their own situation. In some cases, both the husband and the wife have to work to make ends meet, while in others the husband was able to find a steady job and provide for his entire family. Several of these families were able to afford a small apartment with two or three rooms. Two participants had one room set up as living room with a sofa and a TV.

While the apartment was still modest, the difference in living conditions struck me as significant enough that I discussed it with a key informant. He reminded me that a sofa or a TV does not necessarily imply a greater income, as these things represent one-time purchases that might only reflect a temporary windfall. He also explained that the difference in living

conditions was primarily due to a difference in values. Somali Bantu who used to live in Mogadishu place a greater value on a nice home than those who lived in a mud hut in a rural village. As one participant noted:

> Those who came from Shabelle are more integrated with other Somalis. They are more likely to have Somali friends, they speak their language, they even take on some of their character. So they are somewhat better off than the ones from Jubaland. The ones from Juba don't know anything!

These differences in background had an impact on extended family networks and social capital, as well. Somali Bantu from Mogadishu and other urban centers were less likely to have relatives in the USA and thus could not rely on remittances. And as they were less likely to register as refugees, they also had less hope of resettlement to America. But they were more likely to have Somali friends and in some cases, at least, this cultural capital translated into more stable work situations and better work conditions.

Community Support

Demographics and Structures

Understanding community structures and support systems was an important focus of the needs assessment. Interview participants were asked about their personal social networks, about their knowledge of the community in general, and about their experiences of community support. The answers varied considerably based on the background, the time spent in Nairobi, and the occupation of the participant. However, no participant claimed to have a good overview over the community as a whole. One person commented:

> When we pass on the street, we meet each other. But we don't have a census or anything.

Participants were asked to estimate the number of Somali Bantu in Nairobi, and estimates

varied from a few hundred to over one thousand. However, participants had different ideas as to whether there were more Somali Bantu from the Shabelle or the Juba rivers, and whether there were more single adults or more family, indicating that people belong to different social networks and don't know much about the community beyond their network. As a result, it is impossible to make any generalized statements about the demographics of the Somali Bantu community in Nairobi.

Participants were overall in agreement that the community has no organization and there are no leaders. One exception was a young man who claimed that some of the subgroups such as the Shidle and Shabelle had their own associations where members met and communicated regularly. However, he explained, to be part of the group one had to contribute financially, and as he was unable to do so, he was not included in any of the communication.

Other than this one participant, nobody knew of any kind of formalized community structure. One man summarized: "[The Somali Bantu in Nairobi] don't have a community or appointed somebody as leader," while another participant explained:

> There is nothing like that. Everybody is just struggling to survive by themselves. We don't have the brains to come together and organize people! … People are not thinking in those terms. Everybody is just looking to meet their own needs.

This lack of formal structure or organization meant that different Somali Bantus had very different experiences of social cohesion and support based on their individual networks. For reasons detailed below, some were well-connected, while others seemed very isolated.

Ten participants (50%) reported not having many Somali Bantu contacts in Nairobi. Those most isolated were two domestic workers who hardly left the house, followed by two people who had only been in Nairobi for a year or less and had not had much time to integrate

into the community. Other participants with few community contacts included a young man who had married a Kenyan national, and a housewife who seemed to only visit a few selected friends.[7] Somewhat surprising, three participants reported mainly having ethnic Somali friends. All three were women who had lived in Mogadishu before coming to Nairobi, and one specified that her Somali friends were people she had known in Somalia previously. These three women confirmed the statement quoted in the previous section:

> Those who came from Shabelle are more integrated with other Somalis. They are more likely to have Somali friends, they speak their language, they even take on some of their character.

Those participants who seem well-connected in the Somali Bantu community mostly fall into two categories. On the one hand are migrants from Mogadishu who have extended family networks in Nairobi. I interviewed members of two different family networks; both consisted of multiple married couples with children and grandparents who live close together. Some family members had stayed in Nairobi for many years and had stable jobs. Newcomers are able to benefit from the connections and the experience of their relatives. One man, for example, found a job through his uncle. And when I asked one woman how Somali Bantus supported each other in emergency situations, she simply replied: “My aunt will call the others.”

On the other hand, I discovered a group of Somali Bantus who seemed very well-connected even though they did not have family members in Nairobi and many had only arrived in the past year or two. These refugees all had in common that they had lived in the

[7] As with many urban Islamic communities, Somali Bantu in Nairobi expressed an marriage ideal of the wife staying and working at home while the husband leaves the home to earn a living for the family. This ideal is unattainable for many, usually because the husband is absent or unable to provide enough income. However, in one case at least, the result seemed to be a high degree of social isolation for the housewife.

refugee camps for many years. Most were young men who had grown up and gone to school in Kakuma, and who were part of extended friend groups in the refugee camps. One participant who had been in Nairobi less than two years explained about his community contacts here: "There are a lot who I know. We came together from the refugee camp." He estimated that there are hundreds of young Somali Bantus who have come from Kakuma in recent years, adding:

> Some I know from seeing, others I know by name. They are many. Some are in Eastleigh, some in Section 3, some in town.

One of my initial contacts in the community introduced me to a number of her childhood friends who had come to Nairobi, including a very-well connected woman who claimed to know about 300 Somali Bantus from Kakuma in Nairobi, although some had returned to the camp. In fact, this extended network of young adults from Kakuma is constantly in flux as new people come and others leave, or return. But it is here that I could observe the highest degree of community cohesion beyond family members. It was only among young refugees from Kakuma that participants told me they "communicate a lot" or even "help each other a lot".

Communication and Support

In many ways, Eastleigh is divided into those who have to work to make a living, and those who are supported via remittances. Eastleigh is known for its vibrant nightlife as Somali refugees who receive money from abroad often stay up late and socialize. In the mornings, business is slow and the streets are mostly empty. Refugees who have a job, one the other hand, often work seven up to 12 hours a day, 7 days per week, giving them little time for social

life. Within the Somali community, Friday is generally considered a holiday, and some businesses in Eastleigh close for the whole day or at least for the afternoon. But I've previously met Somalis refugees who complained that their employer wouldn't even give them leave on important holidays such as Id ul-Fitr and Id ul-Adha. The situation is even worse for many domestic workers who complain having to work from early in the morning until late at night.

Most interview participants agreed that there is little time to meet others in the community. This was true both of people with few contacts and of those who were well-connected. One person with a lot of friends explained:

> Most of the daytime we're busy working. We don't have time for friends because when we leave our friends it's already nighttime. And we can't go and visit our friends at nighttime because we're afraid of the Kenyan police … so you can say we have no time to visit our friends.

Another participant agreed with this assessment, but qualified it somewhat:

> We don't communicate since everyone has their own problems. But we have each other's phone numbers. On Fridays we sometimes come together or call each other. If someone has a problem, they will inform the others: We have this problem, please come tomorrow or on that date. Otherwise, everybody is going to their jobs every day, trying to survive, so we don't have chances to see one another.

One woman who worked as a house helper described the difficulty of even making the time to come for the interview. She had to plead with her employer to let her go, lying that it was a close family member to required her.

While virtually everybody in Nairobi has a mobile phone and even smartphones are widespread, most people uses pre-paid plans and many pay by the minute. Calls are generally cheap at 2 or 3 Shillings a minute, and credit can be bought in very low quantities of 20 or 50 shillings, making phone use very affordable. Nevertheless, many refugees have to manage their phone time carefully and often keep calls as short as absolutely possible. In my experience,

refugees will often call each other very briefly just to send a short greeting as a way of maintaining the relationship, but long conversations on the phone are rare.

More important than keeping up with friends in the neighborhood are long-distance relationships with extended family members. Both Somali and Somali Bantu refugees use Wi-Fi connections to have long video chats with relatives in distant places. A number of Somali Bantus told me of a family member in Somalia, in the refugee camp, or in the USA who they talk to on a daily basis.

My interview participants generally agreed that there was a lack of communication within the community. One women with few contacts complained:

> The problem is, they don't communicate much with each other. That's why I don't know more about them.

A young man who had been in Nairobi less than two years admitted that he mainly communicated with his family and friends in the refugee camp, but rarely with people in Nairobi. Another man told me of a WhatsApp group that connected Somali Bantus in the refugee camp with those in the USA. But he added:

> I used to be part of that group … It's mainly the older people in Kakuma who are continuing that group. The younger people are not part of it.

The main way many Somali Bantus interact with each other is when they meet on the streets or in their places of work. Some of those interactions are accidental and superficial, as described in this account:

> I might see you today, but then I don't see you tomorrow. I don't know where you're staying. I just see you on the street. I don't know where you sleep. We just greet each other, then we go. Like that.

But other meetings are intentional and purposeful. Especially young men seek out their

contacts on a regular basis when they look for work or when they need a place to stay. One tailor described his search for work:

> There is no special place that I go to every day, but I just go around and ask friends if there is a job for today. That's how I do it.

Another participants explained how the constant threat of evictions is a motivation to communicate:

> When someone has been locked out of their room and is looking for another room, that's when they visit others, looking for a place to sleep. That's when we meet and ask one another how the situation is.

It is in emergency situations when social networks are activated the most. Some participants told me they call their friends for help when the police have arrested them and are demanding money. Via the ubiquitous mobile money service M-Pesa refugees can easily transfer money to each other, or even directly to police officers to ransom a friend. The same service can be used to collect money for a medical emergency or in case of a burial. One man described:

> When they experience a certain problem, for example if somebody dies, the younger men will call one another and collect a little bit of money to assist that person. Or if somebody else is in a serious problem like somebody was in a fight or was arrested by the police, they will organize themselves immediately and collect a little amount to assist that person.

I followed up on that statement to find out of there had been cases of death among the Somali Bantu community in Nairobi, and he told me:

> There was a Somali Bantu girl not far from here who died, just two weeks ago. She was sick. There was some help from those who lived in Nairobi who shared a little bit with them, and also those abroad have assisted. But only for a burial, since you can't just leave the body in the house. But there was no money for a funeral.

While several participants pointed out that begging is shameful, there seem to be cases in

which it is justified. In a conversation about medical needs, a young father explained:

> If I have a problem that big, like an operation, I go to the people I know and ask them for assistance. Maybe someone can give me 200, someone generous can give me 500, something like that.

The amounts he mentioned are very small, far less than a police arrest could cost, and definitely not enough to cover a surgery. They demonstrate they importance of a large social network in an emergency, so that many small contributions can cover the cost of a larger bill.

A number of participants emphasized that community members are unable to support each other financially because of the lack of money across the community.

> None of them is better than the other, how are they supposed to help each other? If I have something, I can help you. But if I have nothing at all, how can I help you? In terms of being Muslims, we can help each other. Like, if you have a problem at home, we come and help solve it. But in terms of assisting each other financially, we can't do that.

It is hard to control for bias in statements such as these, that emphasize the lack of financial resources across the community. To an extent, interview participants were hoping that the needs assessment would result in some kind of external assistance to them individually or the community in general, and thus downplaying the ability of the community to meet individual needs might have seemed advantageous. As I will discuss in the next section, refugees in Eastleigh have developed strategies to appear more vulnerable vis a vis aid agencies to increase the likelihood of assistance. However, based on my observations within the community and the comparison of different interviews, It seems very likely that many participants indeed received very little financial assistance from other Somali Bantus. Money given is limited to small amounts and usually restricted to emergency situations.

However, the above quote also demonstrates the exchange of non-financial assistance. This includes, perhaps most frequently, sharing food and housing with community members

who are hungry or homeless. It also includes helping with job searches and sharing commission work among tailors. The participant quoted above mentions religious counseling as a way of assisting in situations of domestic conflict, and another participant mentioned prayers as a kind of support. Perhaps the most surprising form of non-financial assistance was mentioned by a young women:

> If someone is taken to the hospital and needs blood donations, they can help with that.

This statement was made by somebody who had lived in Nairobi for many years and experienced community members being involved in serious accidents. Since hospitals in Nairobi generally only stock a very limited supply of donor blood, it is common for relatives or friends of patients to donate blood in such a case. Other interview participants seemed to be fairly unfamiliar with modern medical procedures.

In some interviews I brought up the idea of organizing the community to pool ideas and resources for the benefit of all. Several participants responded very positively:

> It would be good to do that; we could benefit from it. Because what is in my mind is not the same as in your mind. If we come together and share ideas, we might be able to create a better life.

One man agreed with the benefit of community organization, but thought it should include the Somali Bantu diaspora in the USA so that remittances could be made more strategically:

> Personally, I could suggest that we form a committee here in Nairobi, and another one in the US, then we can communicate over the phone, then they can assist us. That way I think we can improve our future and make better lives. For them, they can even create jobs for the ones here. And those who are here, we can even create a group by calling people together – you know if I know five people, and he knows five people, we can each call the five we know and come together and create a group. Then we can create jobs, we can be self-employed. That way it might work.

Others, however, seemed less hopeful that the Somali Bantu community could find the will or

the capacity to come together, and nobody seemed motivated enough to volunteer their efforts in making these ideas happen.

After interviewing several families with small children, I asked one of the last interview participants whether it would be possible for mothers to organize a daycare so that they could still go to work:

> Researcher: I've met several women who are staying at home with the babies. Is there a way to have childcare so they could also work?
>
> Participant: No. Only the neighbors, but they are busy working themselves.
>
> R: What if the woman staying at home with the babies could take care of the children of all her friends so that they could go to work and earn something?
>
> P: No, that's not possible. They don't trust one another.
>
> R: Even among the Somali Bantu? You don't trust other people with your children?
>
> P: No, you can't trust them with your children!

This response was surprising and would need some follow-up research to validate and explain.

Refugee Services

In the waiting rooms of several international NGOs working with refugees in Nairobi, I came across a large poster titled "Refugees in the City." It lists, in a radial diagram, all the organizations offering services to refugees in Nairobi, categorized by the kind of assistance provided. The number of organizations on the chart is impressive: 18 non-governmental, 4 governmental, and 1 intergovernmental organization. Unfortunately, the poster does not provide any contact information or office locations, only the UNHCR Kenya hotline number is listed.

Government Services and UNHCR

According to the poster, the Kenyan government provides the following services to refugees: Registration & Documentation through the RAS, Protection through both the RAS and the Kenyan police, medical services through governmental hospitals, and education through public schools.

The police station assigned to Eastleigh is Pangani police station, at a distance of about 2.5km from the center of Eastleigh. There is a significant police presence in Eastleigh, both uniformed and plain-clothed officers. As mentioned in previous sections, Somali Bantu refugees regularly interact with the Kenyan police, but do not feel protected by them at all. Instead, the Kenyan police is generally seen as the greatest source of insecurity for urban refugees.

The RAS offices closest to Eastleigh are located in Shauri Moyo, a neighborhood on the south side of Eastleigh, about 3km from where most of the interview participants lived. 'Shauri Moyo', as the offices are called, is well known by most refugees. Eight participants mentioned it by name, and 5 interview participants told of going to Shauri Moyo to register as refugees in Nairobi. One had gone several years ago and described the process as quick and easy. She was registered, approved as a refugee, and received her refugee ID. Others went to register as well but experienced significant delays and had not finished the registration process at the time of the interview. One participant had gone to RAS to get his case transferred from Kakuma to Nairobi but was rejected and told to return to the refugee camp. Others didn't even bother going to Shauri Moyo because they knew they were not eligible to receive help there, or because they didn't think that receiving refugee status was worth the effort. Only one man

expressed interest in applying for documents at Shauri Moyo, but claimed he didn't know how to get there:

> Here in Nairobi, some people say: There is Shauri Moyo. I don't know where that is. Go to Shauri Moyo and get ID. I don't know how to get there. I know nothing about it … If you can assist me, you can take me to Shauri Moyo. That would be very good, so I can get ID, UNCHR passport.

Several interview participants claimed that Shauri Moyo was the only service for refugees that they knew of.

A number of Somali Bantu refugees were aware of government hospitals and schools. Eight of the interview participants had school-aged children in Nairobi and thus needed to find educational services. Not every participant specified which school their children attended, but most were aware of public schools. Several pointed out that going to public schools required documentation. One person who was not documented explained that their kids were not able to go to a free public school while another person had enrolled her children despite being undocumented. They complained that the school kept asking for identification but so far the children had been able to attend school without providing any. A third participant was registered in the refugee camp but had enrolled several children in the public primary and secondary schools in Eastleigh. However, while these schools are official free of charge, participants complained about a number of hidden fees. Some children had to pay 6,000 [8]per term for school lunches, others had to pay for additional tuition on the weekends, or the parents had to contribute a fee of 1,000 per quarter to the parent-teacher association. One woman added:

[8] About $60. See footnote above regarding currency and exchange rate.

> In addition, there are some other things were the teachers tell us bring 150 shillings. Those ones, the government is not aware of, but the teachers tell us to pay them.

Several mothers complained that the cost of education was a big problem and that the school would send their children home if there were unpaid bills. One person admitted that their children were not attending any school because they could not afford the fees.

A number of interview participants lived close to the government hospital on 4 Street in Section 1 of Eastleigh, and most were aware of the existence of the hospital and the fact that services were free. Nine interview participants discussed the government hospital and at least 6 mentioned going there to seek medical help. However, only one participant was satisfied with the services they received. Everybody else complained about the fact that while doctor's consultations are free, the hospital pharmacy does not carry any medicine. One mother explained:

> I went there once. I took my child. They checked and then they said: Your child has a cold. Then they wrote a prescription and told me to go and buy the medicine outside. Most of the time they don't have the medicine you need … St. Teresa is better because they have the medicine in the hospital. At the government hospital, they'll write you a prescription but you have to buy the medicine at the private pharmacy where they charge you a lot of money.

Another person added that lab work such as blood tests or x-rays are also not available at the government hospital and need to be purchased at private facilities. There seemed to be some confusion about what services are actually available and also about the documentation needed to access them. While one participant claimed that it wasn't possible to have a delivery at the government hospital, another woman pointed out that she delivered her child there. And while one person stated that they did not need to provide any kind of documentation when visiting the government hospital, another one said that the hospital needs some kind of identification

but will accept any kind of refugee document. One man, finally, complained that he wasn't able to access government services because he had lost his only document.

The fact that interview participants did not see much value in the free doctor's visits at government hospitals can be explained through the overall health-seeking behavior of refugees in Eastleigh and in the camps. In many cases of sickness, refugees don't go to the doctor at all, but simply go to the closest pharmacy and ask the 'doctor' there – usually just a clinical officer – which medicine they should take. The most common options include painkillers and antibiotics. One interview participant reflected this attitude in her response:

> The doctor is good, in terms of consultation and diagnosis, and he might give you some painkiller. But the better medicine you have to buy from the pharmacy. They can't treat you like the doctors from the pharmacy.

Once refugees have registered with RAS at Shauri Moyo, the second step is usually to visit the UNHCR, the one intergovernmental organization listed on the poster mentioned at the beginning of the section. Not only does the UNHCR process resettlement cases for refugees hoping for third-country resettlement, but through their urban program the UNHCR also provides some basic services to refugees. On top of that, the UNHCR is also a good place to get referrals to NGOs providing services in the Nairobi area. In my conversations with refugee providers, there was often an assumption that before refugees approached an NGO, they would have already been to UNHCR.

The UNHCR offices in Nairobi are located off Wayaki Way in Westlands, more than 8km from Eastleigh. That means refugees have to pay for a 30 minute taxi ride or figure out how to take two busses to get there. Once they make it to the UNHCR offices, they encounter very tight security measures. Refugees wait outside the building for their appointment, then they

are allowed into a special area to talk to an officer behind on the other side of a window, somewhat similar to the consular section of an embassy. If they don't have an appointment, they can let the guards know why they have come and wait outside in case somebody has time to talk to them. There are usually dozens of refugees from different nationalities camping out outside the building in the hopes of getting an appointment. Some who are homeless might spend days or weeks around the UNHCR offices, hoping for shelter. They are, of course, very vulnerable to police harassment there, and aid workers have confirmed that occasionally the police will detain a whole truckload of refugees right in front of the UNHCR to deport them to the refugee camps.

One of the interview participants, a woman who had lived in Nairobi for a long time and who seemed to be in a fairly stable situation, was aware of the services the UNHCR provides and had actually been to the offices in Westlands to ask for assistance. She described being referred to UNHCR by an NGO:

> We have some help here from UNHCR. One time they told me to go to Kakuma. But personally, I can't live there in Kakuma.

When asked what advice she could give to newcomers in Nairobi, one thing she mentioned was to "know the guys at UNHCR."

Another participant had only arrived in Nairobi recently with the specific intent of moving his case from the refugee camp to Nairobi. He summed up his experience:

> I came to Nairobi to look for assistance from any NGOs. I asked others and they told me to go to Westlands. There is an NGO working for refugee affairs in Westlands. Then I went there and those people told me I have to go to Shauri Moyo … I have tried to communicate with them so many times but the last person I talked to told me to go back to Kakuma. I didn't get any assistance from them.

I confirmed that the 'NGO' he was talking about was UNHCR.

Other than these two, no other participant reported having actually been to the UNHCR offices, and several had never even heard of them. Especially refugees who had come from the camps and were used to interacting with the UNHCR there were surprised when I asked about their offices in Nairobi. One young man responded: “I head there is UNHCR in Nairobi, but I don’t know where it is.” When I asked him if he had ever traveled to other parts of Nairobi outside of Eastleigh he said: “No, I’m just here.”

Many Somali Bantus had arrived by bus right into the center of Eastleigh and never seen other parts of Nairobi. They seemed to only move around in a very small area within Eastleigh between their home and their place of work, always careful to avoid the police. Leaving Eastleigh to explore Nairobi seemed like a terrifying idea to some. While it is true that compared to the refugee camp, the complexity and size of Nairobi can be confusing and it would be easy to get lost, it is also somewhat ironic that refugees are more afraid of moving around Nairobi than of being in Eastleigh. Studies have shown that police harassment is much more prevalent in Eastleigh than in other parts of Nairobi. Refugees in Kasarani, for example, report only half as many arrests and pay only half the amount of bribes to police as those in Eastleigh. Yet many interview participants seemed confined to the very neighborhood that posed the highest risk to them.

NGO Services

I had worked in Eastleigh for many years prior to this study and thought I knew the neighborhood well. I had even had Somali refugees give me tours of Eastleigh, pointing out important places and introducing me to various friends and acquaintances along the way. Yet in all my time I had never encountered an NGO serving refugees in Eastleigh – other than, of

course, the Mennonite Fellowship Center mentioned in Chapter 1, where adult refugees were offered ESL and computer classes, as well as access to a reading room. Occasionally I would see an ambulance from Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) driving down the street, but I had never encountered an advertisement or an outreach event, or seen a sign on a building indicating the presence of a refugee NGO. So I was very surprised to see the list of 18 NGOs listed on the poster "Refugees in the City", and to hear about the various services offered to refugees in Eastleigh. An Internet search quickly revealed that most of these NGOs do not specify any office locations in Eastleigh, and even online map services do not list most of their locations. So I decided to visit the main offices of several of these organizations, instead.

Most refugee NGOs have their main offices on the West side of Nairobi, in neighborhoods such as Kilimani, Lavington, or Westlands. These are all upper-middle class areas at least one hour from Eastleigh by public transport. In some cases, as with the Refugee Consortium of Kenya (RCK) or the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the offices are on a separate plot with a sign at the gate. The gate is guarded, however, and without an appointment it is difficult to even get to the reception. In other cases, such as with IRC or RefugePoint, the offices are located in a larger office building but do not have a sign outside the building or anything else indicating their presence. To reach the reception of the NGO, I had to explain myself to the reception or guard of the entire office building, knowing exactly where I wanted to go. In all cases, it seemed clear that walk-in clients were discouraged.

After visiting the main offices, I was then directed to the Eastleigh branches of several organizations: DRC and MSF have offices on 3rd Ave, while IRC, Kituo Cha Sheria, and HIAS have offices on Chai Rd. The first two are actually within Eastleigh and at a comfortable walking

distance from most interview participants. MSF only offers limited medical services, but DRC has a robust refugee program including livelihood training, education, and psychosocial support. However, the DRC branch offices are located in the back of a large Pentecostal Church, which might be a barrier to some of the mainly Muslim refugees in Eastleigh, and there is no sign on the church indicating their presence. Nevertheless, in terms of geography it was the most accessible location of all NGOs I visited. HIAS, which also offers extensive services to refugees in Eastleigh was also located within walking distance, albeit a much longer walk. Situated at the very end of Chai Rd, the HIAS offices are technically not in Eastleigh but in neighboring Pangani, and to reach them a client had to know exactly where they were going, as the offices are in a residential area of what is essentially a gated community. However, the HIAS offices are some of very few actually indicated on Google Maps, making navigation much easier. IRC and Kitua Cha Sheria, while also on Chai Rd, are located deep inside Pangani, a long walk for most Eastleigh residents. They are both found in the same building, an office building with formidable security. Neither NGO has a sign on the outside of the building or a location on Google Maps, and even those who know what they are looking for have to make it past the guarded gate to reach the reception. This seemed especially ironic in the case of IRC, where I was told that walk-in clients are very welcome.

I was quite impressed by the program offered by RefugePoint, a comprehensive package of services targeting vulnerable refugees in Nairobi. However, the organization does not have any offices in the Eastleigh area; their only office location is in Kilimani, an hour away by bus. The office is inside a building called Titan Plaza, but there is no sign to be found and the offices are only accessible through a small side entrance. It took me a good bit of searching before I

had found the right place, and then I had to convince the guard to let me into the elevator. Reaching the right floor, I discovered that the office door was locked and also guarded, creating a second barrier before I could reach the reception.

Overall, my experience of visiting refugee service providers was marked by physical and geographical barriers clearly intended to prevent unwanted clients from reaching those services. I had the advantage of internet access, private transportation, language skills, and of course the privilege of white skin, and it still took considerable effort to reach the reception of any refugee NGO in Nairobi. It is hard to imagine how a new refugee without those resources would ever overcome those barriers.

This was confirmed by statements from interview participants. Eighty percent of participants simply did not know that any of these NGOs existed as none of them had a visible presence within their neighborhood. An additional 10% had heard of the existence of NGOs but had never interacted with them. One man who had been in Nairobi for over 2 years told me:

> I haven't seen it personally, although I have heard that there are some NGOs helping refugees in Nairobi. But I have not come across any of them.

Another participant who had been in Nairobi for about 2 years could name HIAS and RCK and had heard of people who were assisted by them. But she explained:

> I wanted to go and ask them for help, but I haven't found the time yet, because I'm busy getting the children fed, taking them to school, taking care of them. If I try to look for an NGO today, I'll have to close my business and the children might not eat today.

This sentiment was echoed by other participants. Asking for help meant that they had to pay money for transportation and that they lost the income for that day. The two participants who had actually personally interacted with an NGO were, ironically, some of the least needy and vulnerable I talked to. Both had come to Nairobi from Mogadishu and had been here for many

years. Both had husbands with steady incomes and thus had the time and the money to pursue other options. One of these women recounted her experience:

> There are some. One is called HIAS, and one Heshima Kenya. But I've never gotten anything from them. I went once, they told me they would call me, but they never did.

When asked whether she knew of other people who had received assistance, she responded:

> Yes. They went back again and again. They are the ones who have the money for the bus fare to go there all the time … If you don't go all the time you won't get anything.

Only one out of 20 participants had actually received any services from an NGO. She received 6,000 Shillings from HIAS, then was referred to UNHCR. She also went to Heshima Kenya (now called RefuShe), but was not eligible for support there. It is significant to point out that this participant was one of few who was registered as a refugee in Nairobi and had the proper identity documents.

During my interviews with refugee service providers, I was generally impressed by the services offered. However, in addition to the mentioned physical and geographic barriers, I came across two other barriers that made it impossible for most Somali Bantus to access those services. One of those barriers involved legal documentation. Several NGOs explained to me that they were only able to provide assistance to refugees who were registered as urban refugees and authorized to live in Nairobi. The rationale given was that other refugees could receive assistance in the camps and thus donor funds directed to urban refugees should not be wasted on refugees who were already budgeted for elsewhere. Of course, this policy excluded all the Somali Bantus who had come from the refugee camps because they needed additional income. Because they were registered in the camp and not in Nairobi, they were automatically ineligible for most services in the city. However, camp refugees were not the only ones

excluded. As refugee NGOs were well aware of, the Kenyan government had discontinued to register urban refugees in 2016. Anybody who came to Nairobi after that either did not bother to register at all, or they had registered but then been told to proceed to the camps. As a result, anybody who had arrived in Nairobi since 2016 would not be able to receive the required documents to obtain assistance from NGOs. Services were only available for those who had been in the city for a number of years and had succeeded in getting the proper documentation.

The final barrier was only identified during my last interview. I had asked the case worker about the recruitment process for a particular livelihoods program, and he explained that recruitment was done through community leaders. When I prompted him to clarify that statement, I was told that RAS and UNHCR conducted special elections for refugees every two years. In those elections, refugees were given the opportunity to choose community leaders who would represent them vis a vis the refugee regime. It was those community leaders who were contacted by NGOs to disseminate information regarding services, and in some instances NGOs requested these leaders to identify vulnerable (or otherwise eligible) refugees to be selected for assistance.

From the perspective of the service providers, this system ensured the participation of the "refugee community"[9] and thus gave voice and power to refugees. It also meant, of course, that NGOs had to spend less resources on advertisement and recruitment, and only had to deal with select leaders rather than the entire refugee population.

[9] In the case of Eastleigh, the imagined community would consist primarily of refugees from Ethiopia and Somalia, regardless of their ethnicity. Since most service providers only distinguish between country of origin and not ethnic identity, minority groups are mostly invisible and sociopolitical hierarchies and conflicts that refugees bring with them are ignored.

What these NGO decision-makers apparently failed to see was that the system they were using made access to services dependent on politics within the refugee community. In the case of Somali refugees, elections were clan-based, ensuring greater representation and power for majority clans and further marginalizing minority groups. Somali Bantus, already facing multiple levels of discrimination from ethnic Somali refugees in Eastleigh, had no chance of being elected as community leaders and were thus at the mercy of prominent refugees from powerful clans to receive information or be considered for inclusion in NGO programs.

I interviewed one case worker who, after three years in the position, now had her first Somali Bantu client. When asked why many Somali Bantus did not know about the available services, she explained:

> First of all, the community pillar[10] that you have is very, very strong. These organizations, like us, or HIAS, we go for meetings in Eastleigh. UNHCR, most of the time, or Heshima Kenya, or other organizations, they organize meetings for the communities. Do they have a community leader, first of all? … You see? They have to re-organize themselves, come up with a leader, have to approach UNHCR, during election they also vote for their own person who the organization will keep on informing about these events. There are so many events that happen in Eastleigh for refugees, so many awareness on health –you know, outreach programs. Like us, sometimes we have outreach programs in Eastleigh. So that one person can disseminate the information to them. You see? Like me, I've been here for three years. This is the only case I've been allocated for the past 3 years for Somali Bantus. I've never seen them. This is the only case I've personally worked with … But if they just come out and speak for themselves, attend events, there are so many events being organized in Eastleigh. They'll be noticed. But if they keep quiet, you know, and just count themselves as normal Somalis, it will be difficult for people to identify them … It's a matter of them talking for themselves, of being empowered. You see?

[10] While she did not clarify this term, it seemed to refer to the ways the mentioned NGOs engage the "refugee community."

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter, I presented the data collected in community interviews and service provider interviews from the perspective of the interview participants. The focus was on giving voice to Somali Bantu refugees, describing their experiences in their own words and through their own interpretive lenses. In this chapter, I will discuss that data within the larger context of the literature cited in Chapter 2 and through the lens of several distinct theoretical perspectives. This will necessarily lead to some overlap and repetition of information presented in previous chapters, while offering greater analytical clarity.

In the following sections, I use three different analytical frameworks for discussing the findings of this study: First, I use a critical perspective to focus on the structural violence experienced by Somali Bantu refugees caught between the regimes of the Kenyan government, Somali society, and refugee aid agencies. While interview participants are keenly aware of the injustice experienced on a daily basis, their understanding of underlying structures and mechanisms is limited. Combining primary data with existing literature, I attempt to draw a brief picture of the systemic discrimination, marginalization, and exploitation faced by Somali Bantu refugees in Nairobi.

Secondly, I discuss the various ways interview participants navigate and resist the barriers they encounter. By focusing on the agency of Somali Bantu refugees, I intend to balance the first section by demonstrating that, while victimized, these refugees are not helpless victims. Analyzing processes of decision-making and various strategies employed by

refugees in important areas of their lives, I discuss the ways they are able to build their lives within a very adverse environment.

Thirdly, I use a community development framework that focusses on community assets to describe the resources that exist within the Somali Bantu community and the ways these resources are employed for the benefit of individuals and the entire community. This section is intended to point towards ways in which the needs assessment can empower the refugee community to recognize and utilize their assets and includes a number of recommendations. It leads into a final concluding section, in which those recommendations to both refugees and services providers are expanded upon, with additional suggestions for further research.

Structural Violence

The Kenyan Government

Refugees in Kenya are caught in a patchwork system of governmentality that exposes them to multiple levels of exploitation. The Kenyan government has unambiguously communicated their desire to rid the country of refugees in repeatedly declaring their intention of closing down refugee camps and returning refugees to their countries of origin. This is framed as a national security issue to protect Kenya from crime and terrorism. Kenyan court, however, have on numerous times thwarted those plans as contrary to Kenyan and international law, and international organizations such as the UNHCR have pressured the government to respect refugee conventions previously ratified by Kenya.

Unable to get rid of refugees in the country directly, the Kenyan government has adopted a two-pronged approach of, on the one hand, making life miserable for refugees, and, on the other hand, using refugees as scape-goats to score political points. To achieve the first

objective, refugees are forced into remote camps in the most inhospitable areas of Kenya. Extreme climatic conditions, a lack of basic infrastructure, and neglected host communities[11] ensure a situation characterized by crime, poverty, and poor health. Those who attempt to flee these conditions are put into a situation of legal limbo where they are exposed to police harassment and labor exploitation and deprived of access to basic services. Forcing refugees into criminality provides the government with further ammunition to turn public opinion against them, creating a convenient scape-goat for insecurity or unemployment. This gives the government the opportunity to respond to domestic crises with police brutality and indiscriminate operations against 'illegal aliens' to demonstrate their crisis leadership.

With the abrupt dissolution of the Department of Refugee Affairs and the creation of the new Refugee Affairs Secretariat (RAS) in 2016, as well as the cessation of UNHCR status determinations in the same year, the Kenyan Government was able to create considerable confusion as to the process of registration and documentation of refugees and the refugee services provided by the government. Creating bureaucratic barriers did not slow the influx of new migrants, it just reduced the number of those granted refugee status, further pushing potential asylum seekers into legal limbo and vulnerability.

The Kenyan police occasionally enforce government policies by detaining refugees in Nairobi and taking them to court for staying in the city without authorization or being in the country without proper documentation. In addition, the police might return refugees to the

[11] The Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps are situated in poor and marginalized pastoral communities (Turkana and Somali, respectively). With the influx of aid resources and remittances, many refugees in those camps find themselves in a better situation (in terms of basic needs, healthcare, education, etc.) than the host communities. This has often led to envy and conflict between the two groups.

camp without a trial, and in some cases even deport them to the country's borders. More often, however, the police act outside of their mandate, directly exploiting refugees economically. Extortion of bribes by the police is common in other parts of Kenya, as well, but especially pronounced in Eastleigh. Pangani police station, which services Eastleigh, is among the most notorious stations in Nairobi in terms of police impunity and deaths in police custody. Betts et al. suggest that both the number of arrests and the amount of bribes paid are significantly higher in Eastleigh than in other parts of Nairobi, at about twice as high for Kenyan Somalis and six times as high for Somali refugees (Betts et al. 2019). Somali refugees in particular, are reportedly seen by police as "ATM machines" to collect money from. The fact that most arrests never lead to charges, let alone a day in court, confirms this perception. Despite public statements and official government policy, law enforcement profits too much from the presence of undocumented refugees to actually remove those they arrest to the camps.

Somali Society

The legal predicaments of refugees and unwillingness of the police to provide protection enables other actors to exploit refugees as well. These include both Kenyan nationals and refugees themselves seeking cheap labor. While economic exploitation is widespread among Kenya's poor and the protections provided by labor laws are generally ignored in the informal economy, refugees are especially vulnerable, both due to their legal situation and their lack of social and cultural capital. But not all refugees experience these factors in the same way. Minority refugees such as the Somali Bantu, while ignored by most policymakers, suffer much the same marginalization and oppression that they experienced in their home countries. Social

hierarchies and racialized stigma are exported from Somalia and leveraged by members of powerful groups to benefit from the vulnerability of minorities.

The lack of cultural capital in terms of language skills (English and/or Swahili) and cultural competency (awareness of Nairobi geography and society, understanding of Kenyan institutions) force Somali Bantu refugees to stay within the Somali community in Eastleigh were they can hope to find jobs. The limited options available to them place these refugees in a context of racial discrimination characterized by verbal abuse and exploitative work conditions. Ethnic Somali refugees often benefit from connections to Kenyan Somali clan-members in the Eastleigh business community, in the humanitarian regime, and even in the police force which they are able to leverage against Somali Bantus in the case of conflict. These practices have been documented for the refugee camps; the interviews conducted for this study reveal that they are prevalent in Nairobi, as well.

Service Providers

Despite the presence of numerous refugee-serving NGOs in Nairobi and the excellent services some of them provide to refugees in Eastleigh, Somali Bantus remain woefully underserved by these organizations. To a large degree, this is explained by blind spots among NGO staff. Many organizations simply categorize refugees by country of origin (as do the official figures published by UNHCR) but fail to distinguish between different ethnic, racial, and caste groups within those countries. In some cases this is a deliberate form of 'colorblindness' to avoid replicating group conflict from the countries of origin in Kenya, in other cases, it is simply a lack of training and cross-cultural competency on the side of service providers. Regardless, the resulting ignorance is making staff of urban refugee-serving NGOs largely oblivious to the

plight of marginalized groups within the refugee community. In one interview, I was told that most staff had never even heard of the Somali Bantu, let alone knew of their situation and their needs as a minority.

The practice of many NGOs of utilizing 'community structures' that were only created by the RAS and UNHCR by conducting elections of refugee 'leaders' is reminiscent of colonial approaches in Kenya, where British authorities dealt with local 'chiefs' to better manage the occupied population. By placing the power of selecting refugees for assistance programs into the hands of these refugee leaders, NGOs are effectively giving up on anti-discriminatory policies of practices of affirmative action, simply assuming that refugee leaders will select participants equitably. Historically derived processes of discrimination and marginalization present in Somalia thus become replicated in the Somali diaspora in Nairobi. The results have been documented in this study: Most Somali Bantus are completely unaware of outreach efforts conducted by NGOs, and many haven't even heard of the existence of these NGOs.

The policy of NGOs to base eligibility for their programs on proper documentation replicates the injustices of the Kenyan government in their treatment of refugees. In effect, any change in government policy regarding registration and documentation of refugees results in drastic changes to the population served by NGOs, and an increasingly hostile government posture over the last years has significantly decreased the number of urban refugees eligible for assistance. As a result, many of the most vulnerable (including virtually all newcomers to the city) are excluded from services.

Refugee Agency

Migration

With the initial outbreak of civil war in southern Somalia and the resulting atrocities and famine, many Somali Bantus fled the country on very short notice and without the ability to make preparations. As a result, the flight to Kenya was marked by incredible hardship and often resulted in the death of family members along the way. In these cases, the situation of Somali Bantus matched the global perception of refugees as "helpless victims" (Wirtz 2017). In the following decades, however, Somali Bantu migrations within the region have become characterized by a high degree of agency and strategic decision-making. This includes the initial journey out of Somalia, which is often still a flight from violence and insecurity, but is now accompanied by more careful planning. Even in cases where a husband was killed by al-Shabaab terrorists, the wife might delay fleeing the country for several months to wait for more favorable conditions. In other cases, refugees decide before they embark on their journey whether they want to head to the refugee camps or travel directly to an urban center such as Nairobi.

These decision-making processes are even more pronounced once refugees consider secondary migrations. Some refugees might decide to register as refugees in Tanzania or Uganda, only to return to Kenya after evaluating the economic situation there. Others have lived in the refugee camps for many years, assessing the needs of different family members in terms of education or healthcare, before deciding to send some individuals to urban areas. The journey from Kakuma to Nairobi costs 3,000 shillings and includes numerous police check-points; it requires careful preparations and financial investments. Those who move to Nairobi need to return to the camp temporarily for the sake of a 'verification exercise' of registered refugees, conducted by camp authorities, or for their next interview in the ongoing

resettlement process. Others decide to return to the camp after evaluating their options in Nairobi and deciding against the risks of urban life. Once Somali Bantus from the diaspora are involved, migration routes become even more complicated. A young woman might move to Nairobi to marry a man from the USA, but on his next visit they decide to go see their families in the refugee camp together. Another refugee might partner with a relative in the diaspora to start a business trading goods between Nairobi and the refugee camp, or to start construction on a house in Mombasa. While these cases of increased mobility are rare, they do form part of the picture of the Somali Bantu community in Nairobi. Overall, decisions to travel or migrate illustrate the agency of Somali Bantu refugees and provide insights into decision-making on both individual and family levels.

Work

A 12-year old girl working as a domestic servant in the home of a Somali family has very little agency. There are several cases within the Somali Bantu community in Nairobi where minors were simply taken along when the employers moved to a different country, and sometimes abandoned or passed on to another family when those employers no longer had need for them. While these extreme cases exist within the community, most Somali Bantus have considerably more agency in their choice of work and their strategies to find income and to manage their financial resources. Young adults living in Nairobi are usually in constant communication with their families and often experience considerable pressure to send remittances back to the camp, but overall they experience a high degree of autonomy in their life in the city. What kind of work to pursue, when to quit an abusive job, or whether to start their own business are all choices these refugees have to make themselves, and their strategies

in doing so often reveal long-term plans or dreams.

There is a strong cultural expectation that women should marry young and be housewives while their husbands provide an income for the family, and in some cases these conventions are followed, providing women with some amount of financial security but also limiting their options of contributing to the needs of the family. In a few cases, especially when the children are off to school, wives might try to find work to supplement their husband's income, but more often, women act as heads of households after being widowed or divorced, and are forced to provide financially for themselves and their children. In these situations, Somali Bantu women rise to the challenge of starting and running their own business, often with little or no formal training.

Men have more options in terms of work opportunities, and Somali Bantu men engage in occupations as diverse as religious teachers, cooks, shopkeepers, waiters, or tailors. Finding the right job is a common and constant struggle, and refugees strategically utilize their extended families and their friend networks to achieve their goals. Particularly when it comes to starting businesses, Somali Bantu men demonstrate significant planning and forethought in researching costs and market conditions and searching for investment capital to realize their dream.

When they are unable to make ends meet, refugees have a number of options of asking for help, negotiating with landlords and employers, asking friends for help, pursuing assistance from the diaspora, or moving (back) to the refugee camp.

Community

Despite the restrictions of harsh working conditions and limited resources, many Somali

Bantu refugees are able to invest in their social networks and reap the benefits of social and emotional support. Some utilize their extended family, living together with grandparents or moving close to an uncle or a cousin; others nurture close bonds to childhood friends. Even those who have left their families behind in the refugee camp try to communicate on a regular basis and, when possible, send money to support parents or siblings. Occasionally, they will return to the camp for a month or two to visit and help their families, or they will host a family member who is traveling to Nairobi to medical treatment. Many Somali Bantus have relatives in both Kakuma and Dadaab camps, as well as in Somali and in the USA, embedding them in multi-local and transnational networks of communication and support. Others have close childhood friends who grew up with them as neighbors or schoolmates, and who might regard each other almost like family members. Friends who live and work in Eastleigh will check in on each other on a regular basis and spend their little free time together.

For young adults, the biggest decision in terms of investing in their social networks is to get married. Women might get married between 14-20 years of age, while men are usually in their late 20s or early 30s. This has to do, of course, with the financial burden of the bride price and the *meher* on men, which can go up to several thousand US dollars. As a result, men face a significant barrier finding a wife and need to develop complex strategies to raise the funds needed for a proper marriage. Those who are getting significant amounts of remittances from the US might decide to have two or even three wives, while other wait many years before they can afford even one. In the meantime, young men and women in Nairobi have opportunities to socialize without supervision or knowledge of parents or other relatives, and in some cases

romance leads to secret marriages that will later have to be negotiated with the bride's parents.

In reflecting on life decisions, some Somali Bantus regret coming to Nairobi. Occasionally, a refugee will decide that life in Somalia or in the refugee camp was actually better for them, or that a different urban center in East Africa provides more opportunities. But overall, Somali Bantus appreciate the opportunities of work, education, and healthcare found in Nairobi and are willing to put up with the disadvantages of police harassment and high cost of living to make a life here. Those who have registered as refugees have the ultimate dream of one day going to America, although at the time of this research many were aware the politics in the US made that dream unlikely.

Resources

A needs assessment would not be complete without understanding the resources available to community members and to the community as a whole. The interviews showed that different Somali Bantu refugees in Nairobi have access to different kinds of resources, and rather than aiming for individual self-reliance, community members would benefit from pooling resources to strengthen the community as a whole.

The main difference in terms of resource access can be found between Somali Bantus from the Juba river and those from Mogadishu and other urban centers. Each sub-group has a different set of skills and connections based on their background experiences. While these differences can act as a dividing factor, they also have the potential of benefitting the entire

community when shared between the sub-groups.[12]

Somali Society

Somali Bantus from the Juba river feel very much as outsiders within Somali society, speaking a different language, having a different lifestyle and culture, and not having participated in mainstream society to any significant degree. However, Somali Bantus from the Shabelle river who have lived most of their life in places like Mogadishu, are much more integrated. Standard Somali is their mother tongue and they feel at home in the urban and modern life of Somali cities. They often have friends who are Somalis and have an easier time fitting in among Somalis.

Some see their dependence on Somali society as a curse, forcing them to work for and serve their oppressors. But others are willing and able to use their cultural and social capital for their benefit in finding work or receiving financial assistance in times of need. These community members might be able to act as bridges for the rest of the community, improving access to opportunities and resources within Somali society for others.

One Somali Bantu woman I met had worked as a house helper for a number of Somali families and through that experience had built a knowledge base of potential employers and their expectations. This knowledge enabled her to connect other women to Somali employers and to help them navigate the challenges of this work. Another Somali Bantu woman expressed

[12] This study was too limited in scope to assess the extent to which members of different subgroups are willing to work together. I was, however, able to observe several friendships between Somali Bantu from different subgroups that resulted in sharing of social and cultural resources, which confirmed the assertion of interview participants that such collaboration was possible and beneficial (see page 83). My recommendations on resource sharing among Somali Bantu are based on these findings and the general consensus among interview participants of a common identity across subgroups.

that Somali employers are more likely to mistreat an employee when they assume that the person is isolated and helpless. Having another Somali Bantu broker the work agreement helps the employer know that the person has a social support system in place and also gives them a mediator in case of conflict, lowering the potential of abuse.

These are just some ways in which Somali Bantus who are more integrated into Somali society might offer their resources to other Somali Bantu to better navigate life and work within the larger Somali community of Eastleigh.

Kenyan Society

While Somali Bantus from Mogadishu have an easier time interacting with ethnic Somalis, they often have less understanding and experience of Kenyan culture. Many have only arrived in the country in last five years and have spent most of their time within Eastleigh. Most don't speak any English or Swahili, the two national languages of Kenya, and don't know much about Kenyan institutions. Most interactions with government agencies, be it RAS, the police, of public schools and hospitals, require the ability to connect with and negotiate with the individual officer, a skill that is only learned over time.

Somali Bantus from the Juba river have often spent ten or more years living in the refugee camps, regularly interacting both with refugees from other countries and with Kenyan staff providing services to refugees. Many young adults have spent years in the Kenyan school system, or interacted with Kenyan camp authorities. While life in the camp does not provide the experience of living within Kenyan society proper, it does prepare refugees for some aspects of life in Nairobi, and in many cases they at least understand Swahili and English, even if they might not speak much.

While this cultural capital within Kenyan society is very limited, it does offer a few opportunities to refugees in Nairobi, where those who are most comfortable among Kenyans or most familiar with Kenyan institutions might have the capacity of assisting others in the community as they navigate life in urban Kenya. Most refugees in Nairobi do not have the time or resources to pursue further education and are forced to pick up language and other skills while working, which can be a daunting task in the Somali community of Eastleigh. Those with prior knowledge and skills from the camps can draw upon their experience for their own sake, but also sometimes act as cultural guides to other community members. Yet overall, Kenyan society remains largely untapped as a resource for Somali Bantu refugees in Nairobi, and there might be many opportunities waiting for those determined enough to connect with their Kenyan neighbors.

Diaspora

A good number of Somali Bantu refugee in Nairobi do not have any close relatives in the USA, but for those that do have immediate family members in the diaspora, this connection presents a very significant and valuable resources. Even though Somali Bantus in the US often struggle themselves to make end meet and don't have much capacity to send remittances, they are often able to assist in an emergency and some are willing to invest in business ventures in Kenya. A significant one-time cash flow from the diaspora can be all that is needed for a refugee in Nairobi to start their own business and change their trajectory from simple survival to modest progress. In some cases, the investment into a business is large enough that the new business owner can even hire one or two other community members, thereby creating new jobs and providing income to several families.

A few refugees in Nairobi get modest but regular remittances on a monthly basis. These are primarily wives of US-based Somali Bantu men, who send them money for housing and daily expenses. While these women are very few compared to the overall size of the Somali Bantu community, their financial security enables them to engage in the valuable work of community-building by hosting friends and spending time socializing. Their homes are some of the nicest and largest in the community, making them favored spaces for social activities and places of refugees for those in need. While these women don't necessarily have the personality and ambition to center community networks around themselves, they contribute an important non-financial resource to their friend group and beyond.

Camp Community

The social networks and friend groups that have developed over the years in the refugee camps might be the most important resources for the young men and women from those camps seeking work in Nairobi. Unfamiliar with city life and inexperienced in the workspace, they are able to survive and succeed mostly because of their friends who have gone to Nairobi ahead of them, as well as their families who stayed behind. Friend groups in Nairobi share housing and food with each other, give advice and guidance on finding jobs, and provide moral and emotional support in difficult times. The families in the camps also provide emotional support via regular communication, in addition to giving the motivation to persevere through hardships. It is these connections to friends from the camps that often form the basis of business partnerships. Coming together in the house of a friend with a US-based husband to celebrate a holiday or even gathering for a small wedding celebration strengthens the ties within friend groups and provide opportunities to include others, as well.

While the time and energy to socialize is limited for many Somali Bantus, there are some in the community who not only stay connected with their close friends, but expand their social networks to others. These are the people who bridge the networks between different sub-groups, connecting people from the camps with those from Mogadishu, and creating a stronger sense of a common identity and unity within the community.

Service Providers

As mentioned in the text, there are a number of NGOs in Nairobi that provide services to refugees. These services include food, rent, and household items to stabilize the most vulnerable, business training and business grants, medical and psychosocial services, and others. As I document, while most Somali Bantus in Nairobi are not eligible for these services and the remaining ones face high barriers to accessing assistance from NGOs, a few community members might be able to benefit from them. By providing more information to the refugee community regarding the services available and the processes to obtain them, NGO resources might enable some Somali Bantus to get temporary support with housing or medical needs, or to receive the training and the starting capital for a business.

More importantly, community organization and education might enable the Somali Bantus in Nairobi to approach NGOs as a community, to give voice to their needs and to point out barriers in access, and to potentially effect changes among service providers to better reach those who are vulnerable and empower the community as a whole.

Conclusion

This needs assessment, while exploratory and fragmentary, has resulted in some

actionable information for both service providers and refugees. A better identification of the needs of Somali Bantus in Nairobi, the barriers that prevent them from accessing existing resources, and the assets and opportunities that help them survive, represents not only a gap in the literature, but also a knowledge gap among NGO policy-makers. A better understanding of the current policies and processes of registration and documentation and of the existing NGO programs can benefit individual refugees and empower the Somali Bantu community.

Recommendations to NGOs

Considering the fact that it has become virtually impossible for new arrivals to be registered as refugees in Nairobi as well as the factors pushing camp refugees to move to the city (such as the shortening of food rations), refugee-serving NGOs should seriously reconsider their current policy of only assisting those who are authorized to be in Nairobi. For one, a better integration of camp and urban services would take account of the reality of mixed urban-camp families and hopefully lead to more relevant services (for example, tailoring livelihood programs in camps to improve work retention in Nairobi). More importantly, in recognizing the trajectory of government policies and the effects on those fleeing violence and insecurity, there is a strong humanitarian case to be made for services offered to those without documentation in Nairobi.

In addition, refugee-serving NGOs should reconsider their advertisement and recruitment strategies within the refugee communities of Nairobi. This study has indicated that as many as 80% of Somali Bantu refugees are not aware of the available services, a finding that should fuel further research into the extent and reasons of the failure of information dissemination, as well as the development of strategies to improve the current situation.

Rather than relying on artificially created community structures among refugee groups that ignore historic realities of internal marginalization and exploitation, NGOs should focus on identifying and including those on the fringes of refugee communities and overcoming social isolation among the most vulnerable.

It is not clear what assumptions drive the efforts of refugee-serving NGOs to be geographically and physically difficult to access by refugees. There might be a legitimate concern of being overrun by ineligible migrants or to be targeted by disgruntled clients. Nevertheless, it seems clear that requiring refugees to spend significant time and money to travel to NGO offices excludes those most at need of assistance. Making services truly accessible to vulnerable populations should include having a visible presence within the neighborhoods where refugees actually live in.

Finally, the policy of willful ignorance towards the social hierarchies and conflicts within refugee communities should be re-evaluated. Refugee NGOs should consider including social and cultural structures and dynamics of different refugee groups in the orientation and training of their staff to ensure that service providers are able to identify and address instances of discrimination and marginalization among their clients. This would also include increased vetting and training of staff recruited from refugee communities and related groups (such as Kenyan Somalis) to avoid bias or corruption among NGO staff.

Recommendations to the Community

Somali Bantu refugees in Nairobi operate on very tight margins in terms of social and financial resources, and recommendations to the community needs to take these limitations seriously. It is not realistic to advise plans of action to these refugees that are simply

unachievable. Nevertheless, the study has revealed some areas were small changes could improve the situation of Somali Bantu refugees in Nairobi and potentially benefit the community as a whole.

A first step could be to 'organize' the community by creating some very basic structures. This could involve a community-wide social media group to facilitate awareness and communicate information, as well as the appointing of a leadership committee or at least a spokesperson to represent the community towards external organizations and institutions. Such an organizing would strengthen and expand social bonds within the community and increase the likelihood of community access to NGO services.

A second step could be to facilitate dialogue between different sub-groups. Recognizing the different strengths of camp-based and urban-origin Somali Bantu refugees and building the trust to communicate and share those strengths could benefit each side. While there are some linguistic and cultural barriers to overcome between refugees from the Juba and the Shabelle river, a common ethnic identity already exists, and increased dialogue might result in social partnerships and resource-sharing. If community members could make their knowledge of Somali society, Kenyan society, the humanitarian regime, and the diaspora available to more people within their extended networks, it would increase the overall social and cultural capital of the Somali Bantu community. Increased trust-building and information-sharing might ultimately lead to instances of inter-community partnership, bringing together members from different subgroups and even the diaspora to pursue common business ventures or advocacy efforts.

Recommendations for Further Research

As this study was only exploratory, it has opened up many new questions that need to be investigated. Follow-up interviews could clarify surprising or ambiguous findings (for example, the claim that mothers can't entrust each other with childcare) or investigate outliers in the data (for example, Somali Bantus with higher educational backgrounds), and quantitative research could shed more light on the extent of some of the findings. Further research might focus on subgroups among the participants, such as an in-depth study of domestic workers and their work environment, or young families and the decision-making process regarding child-raising, education, and healthcare. Other research might focus on specific needs or resources within the community, for example a more detailed study of refugee access to NGO services or the extent and nature of refugee interactions with Kenyan hosts.

In addition to further research of the same refugee population in Eastleigh, a more complete study of Somali Bantu refugees in Kenya would include studies of communities in other parts of Nairobi such as Kangemi or Kawangware, and in other urban centers of Kenya such as Mombasa or Kitale. A longitudinal study would shed more light on the development of the urban communities over time, as well as the impact of new immigration policies or other major events. Analyzing the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the refugee community in Eastleigh might be one example of such a follow-up study.

Finally, a second study might investigate the effects of the initial needs assessment on the community. The townhall meetings in the initial stages of the research design and the interviews themselves might have already initiated dynamics of community organization, or conversely emphasized differences among various sub-groups. The presence of a white,

Western researcher within the community over several months might have had an impact in itself. Understanding the effects of research on the community might be valuable to inform future studies and could potentially increase the positive effects of participatory research within the community.

Personal Reflections

This thesis represents the final step in a long process of studying applied anthropology, a process that happened simultaneously to my work with refugee populations in Kenya. As a result, a number of class projects and the applied thesis research all happened within my broader work environment, and my role within my work and within the refugee community gradually evolved over the years of my journey towards becoming an anthropologist. Rather than just appearing in a new setting as a researcher, I started this project with a long history of personal experiences and interactions, and often had to negotiate between my existing roles as colleague and friend, and my new role as anthropologist. Being able to draw on personal experiences and social contacts within the refugee community in Nairobi was, of course, a huge benefit in my research. Not only was I able to analyze and interpret my data based on these experiences, but I was also able to build on existing trust and rapport, and whenever I got to the limits of my (hopefully growing) abilities as a researcher, I was able to just switch into the role of friend.

Conducting research in a place like Eastleigh, where many other anthropologists, political scientists, psychologists, and others have worked in the past, can be intimidating. Not only is there a broad literature so close to my study focus to live up to, but I also encountered refugees with previous experiences of being researched or of assisting in research projects.

This, of course, shaped expectations, and at least once I was quite happy to take clues from one of my refugee friends on 'how research is conducted around here.' At the same time I had found a niche within the refugee community that had been largely overlooked by previous research, and at times I felt the weight of responsibility to give voice to the marginalized in an arena that was already so saturated with high-quality studies.

This study is, of course, limited by the fact that I am new to the enterprise of anthropological research. While the quality of my interviews and my participant observation improved over the course of the study as I gained more experience and learned from early mistakes, I have no illusions that an experienced team hired by one of the larger refugee agencies in town could have produced much broader and more detailed needs assessment. Nevertheless, the project was both satisfying and meaningful on a personal and professional level. Listening to people who felt left out and forgotten sometimes proved significant in itself as it gave them the feeling of being taken seriously and an opportunity to reflect on their situation. More than once a refugee told me that my questions had helped them to become more aware of what was happening in the community or to come up with new ideas on how to improve their situation. That, in itself, has made this research worthwhile to me. In addition, it was rewarding to be able to share my findings with representatives of several different NGOs at the end of the project, which gave me hope that the messages given to me by interview participants might actually get the attention of decision-makers and lead to some amount of change.

Most anthropological studies of refugees in Kenya are academic, and most NGO reports on refugees in Kenya are not anthropological. By discussing my research and my findings with

friends from the NGO community, I reaffirmed my belief that applied anthropology has something important to offer to the work of refugee NGOs in the region. Being able to look at a particular situation from a very holistic perspective and to discover along the way which questions are actually significant to finding solutions has allowed my project to uncover data that most service providers were completely oblivious to. At the same time, I was able to benefit a lot from concepts and ideas developed by other disciplines.

On a personal level, I have benefitted immensely by the process of studying anthropology and applying my new skills to my work environment. I have learned so much not just about the refugee community itself, but also about how to look at their situation from new perspectives. I am confident that the process of this project has helped me just as much as the actual findings at being better in my job. At the same time, anthropology has taught me a lot about reflexivity and positionality. I have become more aware of the immense privilege my passport, my white skin, and my socioeconomic background afford me, and hopefully I have avoided at least some inconsiderate remarks or actions as a result. Learning to live in the tension between my privilege and the experiences of those I research has been and continues to be very difficult, and I still struggle with finding appropriate responses to the needs and challenges I encounter on a regular basis. Especially as I recognize the limits of my ability to understand and emphasize, I am very grateful for the patience and kindness I have experienced from my study participants and friends, and the wisdom they have generously shared with me.

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